The Metabarons™

With the participation of Alexandro Jodorowsky

ROLE PLAYING GAME

Universe Guide

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Abridged Edition

Preface

Phew! My head's on fire!… I just blew a diode! But I'm not complaining — quite the opposite. I'm happy, for I know at last that I'm not human…

The limitations of my bio-organism had been depressing me. Even more than that, it's been the walls of the mental prison that hem us in from childhood, the "rational" mold called school. But then came the Yéti Mutants: Fred Le Berre, Marc Prudhomme, Kurt Mc Clung, and Julien Blondel. They put me under the red-hot rays of their psycho-interrogation lamp and bombarded me with questions for a full fifty hours. Initially, I was overcome with feelings of anger. What right did these young griffins have to dare infringe upon the inner recesses of my cerebral maze in this way, hunting down answers that like giant jellyfish were floating along the veins of my unconscious?

But I had a plan! Slowly, step by little step, I was going to give them the keys to the Incal Universe, which is the same as the Metabarons and TechnoPriests. A hugely immense "oeuvre" that would have taken me at least ten years to recount. But I hadn't been counting on the young mutants' impatience. They wanted to know everything, right away. Showing no respect they fired off their mental probes, assaulting my impregnable Data Bank and under the incessant fire of their questions, my human mask disintegrated.

I ceased being a man and became a universe.

Far, far away, in an ethereal zone where my body didn't exist, I saw myself giving away tons of secrets, with an absolute precision that I had never before dared to imagine, even in my dreams. At the height of the trance, streams of words — barely comprehensible for they were of human origin — gushed from my mouth, laying bare the hidden structure of the cosmos, the nature of the people who live there, the mysteries of parallel universes, thousands of centuries of history, countless weapons and vessels, outrageous doctrines, judges and laws, and billions of other things as well…

A new chapter in the history of my Jodoverse came to life with each one of their questions. A moment of extreme ecstasy! A singular experience that can only be compared to what happened to me one day in Mexico while meditating in a Buddhist Temple with a Japanese Zen master. Suddenly, he subjected my spirit to a koan — a sacred riddle conceived to break the straight jacket of the intellect: "I have no beginning, nor end. Who am I?"

I knew very well that some monks go into retreat for ten or twenty years looking for an answer, which isn't necessarily expressed in words. But, body taught with effort like a readied archery bow, I wanted to find the solution in that very instant: "I am god; that's it, I am everything."

Full of wrath and disdain, the master threw me out of the temple: "Intellectual! Learn to die!" My failure was filled with such disgrace and shame that a part of me died on the spot. Instantaneously, I became another. And from the deepest reaches of my unconscious, a voice that was already no longer human exclaimed: "There is no beginning and there is no end. There just is."

Thank you for your questions, Yéti. They blew my diodes. They made me into a galaxy of answers, nothing but answers. Ever since, I roam infinite space, in search of the first and last question.

Alexandro Jodorowsky

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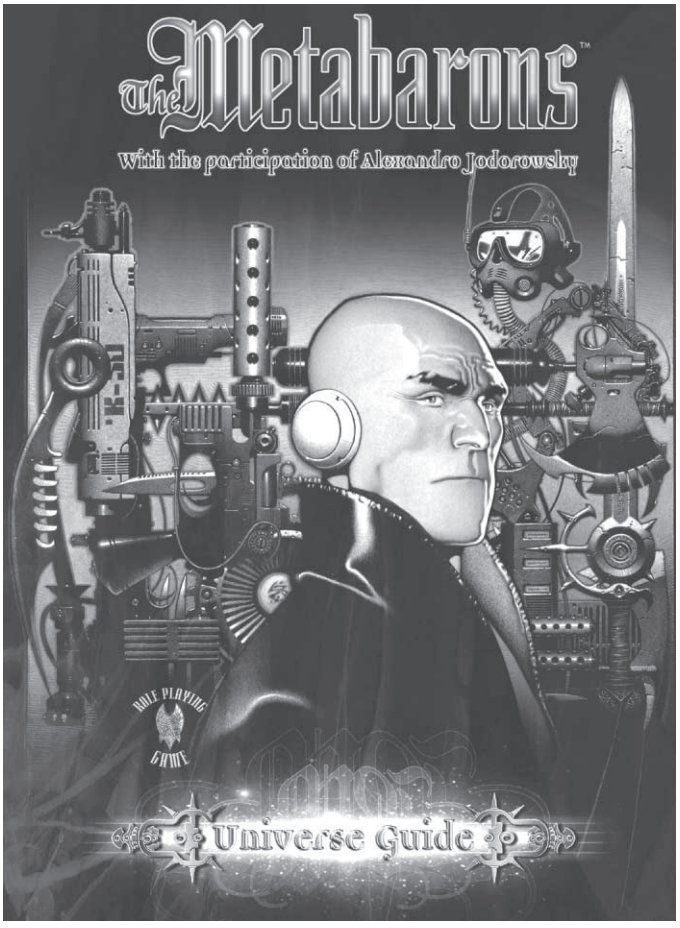

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Conception and Development: Julien Blondel, Fred Le Berre,
Kurt McClung, and Marc Prudhomme,
with the participation of Alexandro Jodorowsky
American Adaptation: Nikola Vrtis with Scott Palter
Short Stories & Writing Direction: Fred Le Berre
Continuity: Marc Prudhomme
Coordination: Nadège Delbos and Kurt McClung.
Design of Original Book: Régis Haghebaert, Stéphane Martinez, and David Panzo
Graphic Conception: Régis Haghebaert, Virgnie Bréham, Christophe Bonneterre, Olivier Hug, and David Panzo.
Layout & Manufacturing of Original Book: Nathalie Rocher
PDF Design, Layout, & Creation: Nikola Vrtis
Cover Art: Travis Charest
Interior Illustrations in PDF: Cyril Adam (pp. 98, 104), Bernard Bittler (p. 95), Aleksi Briclot (pp. 94, 97),
Juan Gimenez (pp. 8, 40, 44, 96, 144), Boris Golzio (pp. 62, 63, 152), Zoran Janjetov (pp. 37, 42, 54 upper),
Thierry Masson (pp. 129, 130, 132 lower, 133, 135, 136), Mœbius (pp. 18, 30, 54 lower, 59, 117, 142, 145, 146, 149),
Gérald Parel (p. 8), and Roberto Zoulie (pp. 132 upper, 134).
Coloring: Studio Beltran, Guillaume Bessis, Philippe Guinot, Walter Le Brec, Agnès Moreau, and Pascal Pontoire.
French Editing & Corrections: Sophie Lamotte, Ronan Le Breton, Antoine Pinchot, and Loïc Portnoë.
English Tranlsations: Diane Bertrand, Justin Kelly, and Joan Wilchins
English Editing: Rachelle Brissenden, Kurt McClung, and Nikola Vrtis

A big thank you to: Didier Gonord, Bruno Lecigne, Philippe Hauri and the Yéti Team.

French version developed and published by Yéti Entertainment S.A. English version developed and published by Humanoids in association with Yéti Entertainment S.A. The Metabarons and The Metabarons logo are trademarks of Les Humanoïdes Associés S.A., © 2003 (US & EU) Les Humanoïdes Associés, Geneva (Switzerland). Original Metabaron character created by Moebius® and Alexandro Jodorowsky. The D6 System game mechanics used herein are used with permission of Humanoids, Inc.

French First Printing March 2001. Printed in Spain. PDF Edition April 2003. PDF created in USA.

The Empire

Wonder of wonders, fruit of the eye of the Omphal, this vast universe is richly inhabited. Indeed, the area mapped out by the eager reach of humans, far beyond the bounds of the Milky Way (Terra Prima's galaxy), contains a wide assortment of races and peoples, most of them human, but some mutant and alien as well. These worlds, completely alien to one another, are united beneath the authority of the Empire, a colossal organization whose powers extend as far as its ships can fly. The Empire boasts an armed force — the Endoguard; an ever-present clergy with godlike technological powers — the Techno-Pontificate, also known as the Techno-Technos or the Church of the Industrial Saints (C.I.S.); and a financial institution — the Ekonomat, which has great influence over all economic transactions. Besides these, two other groups carry considerable weight: the Maganats and the Union of Planets, also known as "the Colonials." A Maganat is any planet, group of planets, system, or even group of systems placed under total ownership and authority of a leading Noble House. By definition, the Maganats are loyal to the Empire, and Janus-Jana is their leader. However, this apparent obedience does not rule out intrigue, which seems to be the criterion rather than the exception. Depending on circumstances, these Noble vassals either hold almost no power, or they possess means tremendous enough to at least challenge the Empire, although not to overpower it. The Colonials, on the other hand, are independent in appearance but remain more or less loyal to the Empire. Each one of the numerous Colonial planets is ruled by a "Kamar," completely independent of the concerns of the Imperial Court. As for the Union of Planets, it includes two main branches, which are themselves subdivided into clans. The first branch includes two major clans: the Troglosocialiks and the Menscheviks. The second branch includes a wide array of minor clans: the Ultra-Colonialists, the Super-Conquerors, the Troglo-Barbarians, the Poly-Schismatics, the Amico-Visitors, the Hyper-Putschists, the Trotsko-Revolutionary Avatars, and the Proto-Nihiliks, to name just a few of the more prominent.

Veritable History of the Trans-Bourbon Lineage

Janus-Jana, the illustrious Imperial Siamese couple, is the last of a line that dates back to the introduction of royalty in the Kingdom of France, part of Terra Prima's "Old World." Indeed, when the Trans-Bourbon family acceded to the Imperial throne in the year 3499, Rosemonde I the Rebis resumed the broken thread of the dynasty of magical monarchs, even though centuries had passed in the interval. Today's Trans-Bourbon family, far from being an Imperial offshoot springing suddenly from the void, can trace deep roots back to the royal breeding-ground of Terra Prima's absolute monarchs.

After the citizens of Paleo-Paris, in 1789's great current of wrath and joyful regicide, had cast aside the political order that had controlled their destinies, the Dauphin Louis XVII, son of Louis XVI and heir apparent to the throne of Paleo-France, became the pivotal focus for both supporters and enemies of the monarchy. This second child of Louis XVI, became first the Duke of Normandy, then the Dauphin when his older brother died on June 4, 1789, and consequently he was jailed in the Temple prison in August 1792. Official history maintains that he quickly succumbed to an onset of illness caused by poor hygienic conditions, perishing in the Temple on June 8, 1795. Of course questions were raised, and over the following decades, many claimed that the true Dauphin had fled and was waiting for the right time to return and reclaim his rightful throne. Then again, over the next several years, numerous self-proclaimed "Dauphins" appeared, demanding to be granted titles, honors, castles, and all the other normal trappings of kingship. As time passed, reliable witnesses to the events disappeared, but the mystery remained. Had the Dauphin died at the Temple or not? Had he escaped? Or had he been murdered by a reactionary from a rival faction in order to prevent him from claiming his rights?

The questions were examined seriously. The body was exhumed numerous times, but the experts' reports all gave completely different and very surprising results. How could the body of a ten-year-old child have measured 4'8", or even 5'4"? The Dauphin's heart, purloined by Doctor Pelletan during his autopsy, had passed all his tests and was now embalmed at the Paleo-Basilica of St. Denis. Unfortunately, however, a relic cannot talk. It was not until the late twentieth century, with its understanding of the mysteries of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), that the questions which had held all the historians spellbound over the previous two centuries could finally be settled. The verdict: the embalmed heart indeed belonged to a son of Louis XVI. Comparative analysis carried out on DNA of the living descendants of the Bourbons was definitive. Once again, the winds of oblivion did their work, and the mystery of the Dauphin who died in the Temple became no more than a curiosity for nostalgic historians. But what was the truth of it?

The Unsuspected Mother

The truth of it was this: at the dawn of the year 1795, on a cold wet night at the end of winter, a citizen named Amelie Ladoucette, former nursemaid to Louis XVI's wife Marie-Antoinette in the castle of Versailles, arrived at the Temple prison to switch her own son with the Dauphin. Of the four known attempts at substitution, this is the one that succeeded. To save the Dauphin, direct inheritor of the miraculous power of divine essence of the kings of Paleo-France, Amelie Ladoucette consented to lie, to endure taunts from corrupt guards, and above all, to sacrifice the son she cherished more than anything. Of course,

this raises several new questions. Why then would DNA analysis of the embalmed heart have confirmed succession? Did she act alone, or were her actions inspired or even masterminded by others?

What is for certain is that the citizen Ladoucette must have been utterly convinced of the greater good of her actions to consent to so many sacrifices. Presumably, since she had lived intimately with and tended to the royal family, even serving as nursemaid to the children of the king and queen, she could well have been acting in response to a royal summons, which would have driven her to endure anything to ensure the perpetuation of the line. Since she had looked after Louis XVII from his infancy, she would also have felt some maternal sentiment for him. But above all, he was the son of the king, a man so far above her and yet so close, whom she had loved and given herself to. Amid the easy morals of life in Versailles, she had responded to the needs of a sensual king, yielding to him during an embrace. This combination of facts explains her psychological willingness to offer her own son in sacrifice. Amelie Ladoucette loved the King as a husband and loved the King's son, the Dauphin, as her own.

Moreover, as demonstrated by DNA analysis 200 years later, the son she sacrificed in order to spare the Dauphin was in fact an illegitimate child of the King, and of the same age. Thus, another mystery is explained. The child's corpse in the Temple, whose heart remained for centuries in its hiding place at the St. Denis Basilica, may not have been the Dauphin destined to take the throne and continue the line, but he had indeed descended from the king. Incidentally, the fact that she knew and loved the Dauphin, and had a son the same age, were other factors which probably made it easier for her to become an instrument of destiny by performing the sacrifice.

Michel de Nostre-Dame

But one other factor contributed to things turning out precisely the way they did. The Dauphin's half-brother might have seemed just as adequate a substitute. As far as the affairs of the Kingdom go, that's doubtlessly true. But the Dauphin possessed a unique characteristic, a genetic oddity that made him a long-awaited "Chosen One" to fulfill a grand plan. Louis XVII, the Dauphin, was a hermaphrodite.

Who, then, could have been so interested in one of nature's whims? Who could have attached such importance to a young victim of sexual deformity? And who had the ability to pursue this goal across the centuries?

Amelie Ladoucette was one of the many common women who expended enormous effort trying to bury the traces of their past, because any former servant to the Court would be an obvious suspect to those who hunted down counter-revolutionaries. Her instinct for survival would more likely have encouraged her to keep a low profile, and avoid conflict by any means necessary in these difficult times. So a guide would have to come to her to show her what to do. He came in the guise of a man of mature age, by no means old, but already thoughtfully contemplating the threshold of life. He claimed to be a doctor, and in fact was able to identify her complaint after only a brief examination. With a few gentle but very firm gestures, he brought the calm back to her feverish son's face. He seemed to know all about her. She should have been afraid, but the serenity he exuded inspired confidence. She was willing to do anything for him, and he revealed to her that she could do him a great service. Then, he told her his name: Michel de Nostre-Dame.

"It has been written in the stars!" he repeated constantly. In a pedantic tone, he would continue: "My precious child, the conjunctions tell us it must be so in order for great work to occur. The young Dauphin is intended for the throne, but the history of mankind is inconstant. However, he must rule at any cost. I cannot tell you more, but be aware that he has been awaited for all eternity, and that humanity is depending on you to ensure that one day he may take his rightful place…."

She may not have understood all of the alchemist's plans, but Amelie Ladoucette was convinced. She would make the exchange. She was committed, and would sacrifice her son for the endeavor. On the eve of the day she would visit the Temple to recover the young Dauphin, Michel de Nostre-Dame (also known as Nostradamus) spent the day inside, preparing long lists of symbols and making cabalistic diagrams, all of them confirming his intuitions. At the end of the night, he wrote a new quatrain in his notebook, entitled "The Centuries":

Out of the Temple, born in glory unattained,
Stately, and by oint of holy oil, soon sublime
Sheathed in gold, as centuries pass Him by,
Dauphin will be Rebis: another, yet the same.

Golden Oil

While perusing the story of the Trans-Bourbons and their legendary lineage, some may be surprised to learn of Rosemonde I the Rebis's exceptional longevity. For Rosemonde I the Rebis only ceded his throne after having exercised his power and influence for almost 10,000 years. However, when looking attentively at the genesis of this extraordinary family, the consequence of Michel de Nostre-Dame's great act becomes quite obvious.

Nostre-Dame, who was Rosemonde's mentor and founder, plunged Rosemonde into Golden Oil, the alchemic fruit of the Philosopher's Stone, whose miraculous virtues procure exceptional wealth, health, and youth for those submerged within it. Handed down through his spirit's flesh and blood, these legendary virtues are perpetuated in his descendants (Imperial couples, twins, brothers/sisters, mothers/fathers) who owe their existence, enduring several thousands of years, to the Philosopher's Stone.

The Consciousness of Centuries

In the year 1795, Nostradamus was 292 years old. Accomplished alchemist, high initiate to the mysteries of the Egyptian doctrines, he had accomplished much of his greatest work during the course of his original lifetime. But he had quested ever farther, passing beyond the boundaries set by his brotherhood and, in a sublime transmutation that went beyond all the limits of the philosopher's stone, he created the Golden Oil, a perfect composite of the purest materials. His discovery made him an outcast not only from society, but also from time itself. He was now a strange anomaly with an endless thirst for knowledge, traversing the centuries unmindful of the passing days and years. For among the thousand virtues of the Golden Oil was its ability to confer not eternal youth, but great longevity.

Thus, Nostradamus had plenty of spare time to devote to his studies. He returned to the oldest and most arcane sources of human knowledge on Terra Prima, from the times in which humanity had conversed with the Ancients. Quite naturally, he had the idea of becoming an agent of divinity himself, in order to sway the world's path, to make an influence over the crazed course of a civilization lost in the stars. He just had to find his crystal that he would one day offer to the world, a prism-being he could polish, nourish, and make grow. The Golden Oil would be the cocoon; he just needed a chrysalis.

According to the mystical ancient order Rosae Crucis — taught to him by Christian Rosenkreutz during his training in medicine — the school of Egyptian mysticism had always prophesied that a sublime male-female being would one day become Supreme Ruler and govern the universe. News that the Dauphin, heir to the House of France, was a hermaphrodite, could not fail to interest him. Was he the one destined to rule the world? Nostradamus could only find out by approaching Amelie Ladoucette, for she was the only person who had the ability to replace the Dauphin with a child she knew well. As soon as Nostradamus held the Dauphin in his hands, he thanked and paid the helpful woman, then shut himself off with the child to verify the signs. There was no doubt about his double sex organ. His elegant, childlike face was a blend of feminine softness with angelic good looks. He was clearly the latest descendant of a royal line, which imbued his genes with a measure of perfection. If raised with the proper rites and precepts, the male-female child would only blossom and take on a never-before-imagined role in human history.

Without wasting an instant, Nostradamus secreted the Dauphin far away, to the Burubudur temple beside the bottomless pits on the island of Sumatra in the Sonde Isles at the ends of the Indian Ocean, a retreat he had converted to his cause in order to carry out the training. The Dauphin's training lasted 47 years, which seemed but an instant to the old country doctor so far from his native land. Upon completion of his training, Louis the Dauphin, now Rosemonde the Rebis, had nothing at all in common with a child born in Paleo-France at the end of the eighteenth century. His wisdom stretched far beyond what was known within his century. His mastery of the real and arcane, of cause and effect, was such as only one who had lived a hundred lifetimes could possess. But more importantly, He had the ability to put His will into effect. He was now ready. Michel de Nostre-Dame judged that his work was complete. In 1842, he submerged Rosemonde in a bath of Golden Oil at the heart of the hermetically sealed capsule in which He would traverse eternity. The Supreme Ruler waited in silence, ready to offer himself to the world. Before devoting himself to the joys of a meditative twilight, Michel de Nostre-Dame undertook a final task: he wove a thousand mythical stories and chronicles, which announced the coming of a new Empire for humankind.

The Foundations of the Empire

In 2986, the Sixth World War left no winner or loser, just a pile of ash and ruin. With the majority of its population decimated by the tragedy of nuclear fire, Terra Prima was at last ready to receive the one whose lineage guaranteed Him the throne: the Chosen One, perfect thanks to His double nature, and eternally glorious, thanks to His training. While the Dauphin-Rebis slept, Nostradamus prepared the world for His coming from his secret lair. For almost 20 centuries, he had traced powerful and mystical vectors that had put the hope of His arrival into the hearts of people. He had been heralded and so was awaited.

The era's troubles had reached a culminating point with the near-extinction of all life. Humanity thirsted for only one thing: salvation. The coalition of armed forces, having obtained their claim to rule the planet's rubble in the blaze of combat, gave a warm welcome to this new candidate who was not only from a true dynasty but who left a powerful residue of miracles in His wake. The doors of power opened wide before Him.

The early years of the reign of Rosemonde I the Rebis were restless and chaotic. Old enmities remained, and a number of rival factions used this shift in power as an opportunity to renew their actions. But the training of Michel de Nostre-Dame had borne fruit; among His many other qualities, Rosemonde was firm. Certain Noble

The Perfect Androgyne

From the archives of the galactic human Empire. "Historical Documents" section, "Apocryphal Texts" subsection, "Prophecy" division: "...For it is told that He-She who unites the qualities of Man and Woman, He-She who will be the Sacred Androgyne, the Perfect Being endowed with all qualities of Father and Mother, shall rule forever, and guide humanity towards its destiny with a Divine Hand." –Text in ancient language of Terra Prima, attributed to the human seer Aptisto, who lived in the period of chaos following the Sixth World War.

Houses, and not minor ones, learned that at their expense. Making an example of them did the rest, and in less than three decades, all the institutions of this divided feudal world had pledged their allegiance to the new Emperor. But the power of terror does not solve everything on its own, and so Rosemonde I the Rebis introduced a ritual that still exists today — creating a powerful yet subtle bond that would link the Emperor and His subjects. Once the administrative arm of the House of Trans-Bourbon had inventoried, surveyed, and appraised all the fiefs to the Crown, the Imperial Office of Titles and Deeds redistributed them among any families prepared to swear an oath of personal fealty to Rosemonde I the Rebis. During a sumptuous ceremony of spiritual fervor followed by strict solemnity, the Supreme Ruler named Himself "Emperoress" and bequeathed His vassals with a medallion containing a drop of the holy Golden Oil as a sign of their position in the Nobility. Much later, after humankind had spread across the whole cosmos, those medallions remained objects of inestimable value, of course revered by the descendents of the founders of the Noble Houses, but admired more widely by all.

Later in the reign of the first of the Trans-Bourbons, once Imperial Authority was recognized everywhere and undisputed throughout, Rosemonde gave the order to conquer first the galaxy, and then the entire cosmos. He Himself set things in motion in the year 4503 by transferring the seat of Imperial power to the Golden Planet. At the same time, He instructed the largest and most powerful Houses to go forth and conquer the breadth of the universe, in His name and for His glory. Indeed, conquest and the expansion of the human universe became the hallmark of the era of Rosemonde I the Rebis. Before His reign, humans dreamed only of exploring the boundaries of their solar system. Beneath His rule, the whole galaxy suddenly seemed too small. Adventurous Houses set off to carve out galactic fiefdoms vaster than solar systems, and ever hardier explorers soon thrust beyond the bounds of the Milky Way. Of course there were conflicts at the boundary, and invasions from outside, but also conspiracies and continual struggles for power within the very bosom of the Empire. At the same time, the dispersion of the Great Houses across the endless universe allowed entirely new ways of life to flourish, leading to a variety of customs, and a strong "folk" tradition within the overall Federal mosaic. But the absolute personal power of the Emperoress was the centralizing force of the Empire He embodied, permitting differences to be smoothed over, too-lofty ambitions to be brought down, and humankind's cohesion to be guaranteed during its march of expansion. Despite some difficulties, Rosemonde the Rebis was the uncontested master over the Empire He ruled with an iron hand, with full support from the four Great Pillars: the Techno-Pontificate, the Ekonomat, the Nobility, and the Union of Planets.

The Blood Legacy

The reign of Rosemonde I the Rebis lasted exactly 8499 years, ending in 11998. He used His hermaphroditic qualities to fertilize himself, with the goal of bringing to the world another doubly endowed Chosen One, another Sacred Androgyne. But whether by nature's whim, genetic mishap, or Imperial error, it was male and female Siamese twins that He brought into the world. Joined at the torso, the new Siamese Emperors Artaran and Marlana received training befitting the destiny of those who would one day take the reins of an Empire that expanded every moment. But their training was a long and arduous path, fraught with many difficulties. The Siamese brother and sister, condemned by nature to a life of intolerable proximity, both had raging tempers. Between them they brought new meaning to the word "chaos." Their days were nothing but a long succession of fighting. The sight of their sexually opposite double was a torture just as unbearable for both of them. Their hands were tied, for fear that they would murder each other. But they managed to summon the strength to bite each other furiously in the face, and tear chunks out with cries of horrible pain, because both of them felt equally the harm they were inflicting on each other. Soon, their faces were just tatters, covered in Netranekkon and gold alloy poultices. They raged endlessly, burning with seemingly implacable hatred. During moments of clarity, they were able to rule the Empire with reasonable tranquility, but calm would quickly give way to the storm, and they would renew their cycles of unthinking rage. At that point they had to be locked away within an armored room in the deepest heart of the Golden Planet, to prevent their violent tempers from disrupting everything.

No official rite marked the succession of Rosemonde I the Rebis to Artaran and Marlana. No declaration or decision was made. Nothing about the event made it appear even slightly out of the ordinary. One day, Rosemonde simply disappeared and was replaced by the screaming Siamese twins. Their status as heirs to the throne was well known. So when they assumed power after the First of the Trans-Bourbons had vanished into thin air, nothing was made of it, as if everything was absolutely normal. No trace of Rosemonde was ever found, and His disappearance remains one of the Empire's great mysteries. But since Artaran and Marlana did not seem concerned, life followed its course. And nobody asked even the slightest question.

The Expansion of the Legacy

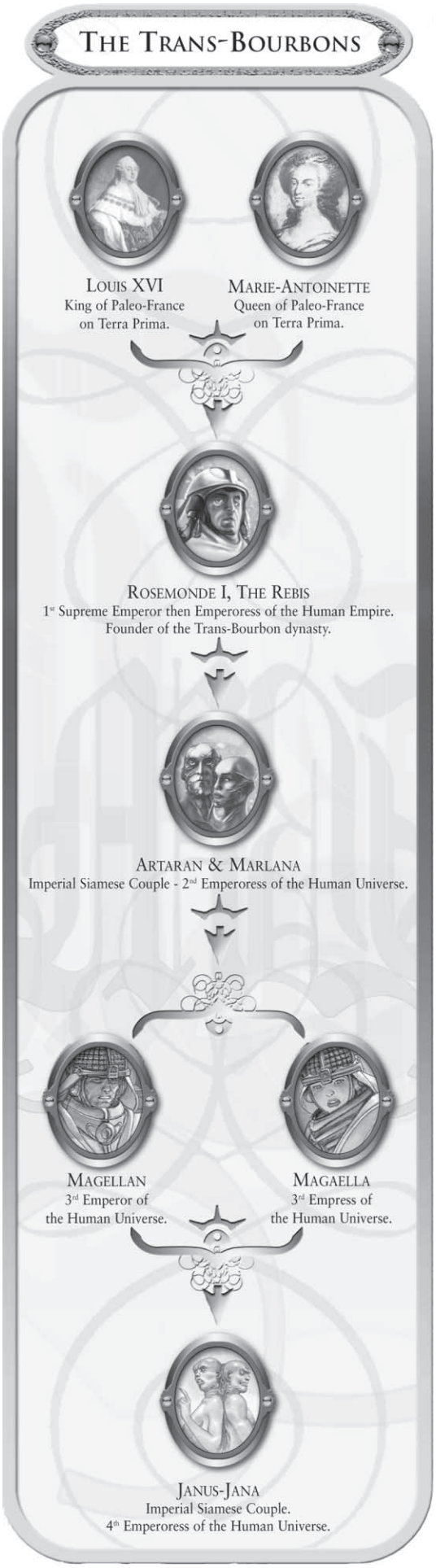
The 11233 years of Artaran and Marlana's reign were without a doubt the most chaotic years in the Dynasty of the Trans-Bourbons. From the very beginning, their Empire had to repel the increasingly frequent galacto-barbaric raids on its borders. The expansion of human civilization was nothing but an uninterrupted succession of battles in concentric rings expanding out from the heart of the Empire. The Great Houses dedicated themselves to the evils of merciless battle in order to obtain new privileges, the Great Pillars themselves harbored a climate of internal struggle, and the Endoguard fought to protect the Empire from ever more powerful alien hordes. The situation culminated in 17789 when the Imperial Couple

fled to a parallel universe to escape takeover by an exterior force of indomitable power. Their retreat lasted for almost six millennia, until new convulsions wracked the universe, once again changing the circumstances.

Surprisingly, the Empire emerged stronger from this long period of upheaval. Alien occupation and the ravages of perpetual war at the border had the effect of drawing the various internal factions closer together, at least superficially, and the concept of a united Empire was reinforced. But the same events had a different effect as far as Imperial power goes. Indeed, the delicate bond that united the Golden Planet to the group of humans spread throughout the galaxy was somewhat shaken by the escape of the ill-behaved Siamese twins. To be sure, none dared speak of treason, but a feeling of abandonment pervaded. So on the one hand, the shattered mosaic that was the Empire found even greater reason to see itself as a unified whole, and on the other, the authority that was supposed to act as the central nervous system of the whole assemblage was showing unmistakable signs of weakness.

At that point, the political genius of the Trans-Bourbons, forged in the crucible of Nostradamus' ancient wisdom, showed its full scope. Having just returned from their parallel universe, Artaran and Marlana did not throw themselves blindly into brutally reseizing power over the four Pillars. Instead, they announced that they were abdicating the throne in favor of Magaella and Magellan, the male and female twins they had sired. This surprise announcement yielded a double benefit: It made everyone forget the mystery surrounding Artaran and Marlana's departure and their sojourn in an invisible and inaccessible realm; at the same time, it distracted attention from the distressing fact that the new Imperial Couple did not even slightly resemble a Sacred Androgyne. Although Magaella and Magellan were a dual entity from the same egg, they were nonetheless distinct and separate beings. With the male heir standing separate from the female heir, the idea of a divine union lost its potency. But the sudden announcement and the new Imperial Couple's charm quickly put all those concerns to rest. In 23231, Magaella and Magellan officially took the destiny of the Trans-Bourbon Empire into their hands. As was the case 11233 standard years earlier, their progenitors vanished quite suddenly without any ceremony, and more notably, left neither trace nor witness behind.

At long last, a time of change and rebuilding had come. And rebuild they did, from top to bottom. A few of the four Pillars were forced to make amends and pledge their allegiance once more, on pain of dissolution. The delicate balance between the components of the Empire had been shaken, but an outline of the Imperial Order we know today gradually emerged. Mysticism gave way to material might, military force, and technology. With peace restored, the human universe began another cycle of development and prosperity. Conquests multiplied, carrying the banner of the Trans-Bourbons ever farther. Then, just as now, even if Imperial law is still not obeyed everywhere, for lack of



Timeline of Key Events

1795 - Exchange of Louis XVII and foundation of the Trans-Bourbons line.
2986 - Sixth World War.
3000 - Departure from Terra Prima. Colonization of the solar system. Paleo-gravitatioal Era
3499 - Crowning of Rosemonde the 1st, the Rebis, Emperor of the galaxy. End of the Democratic Tyrany.
3500 - Biological Revolution: Beginning of the Universal Colonization. Biological Era.
4500 - The Imperial Court moves to the Golden Planet. Development of the Techno-Guild.
6000 - First great galacto-barbarian invasion. Development of the Colonial Houses.
11998 - Birth of Artaran and Marlana, the children of Rosemonde I.
12000 - 2nd great galacto-barbarian invasion.
13500 - Cataclysm caused by the rupture of the ice borders. Discovery of parallel universes.
13612 - First contacts and the adherence of the Empire to the Confederation of Parallel Universes.
13626 - Birth of the Non-Baron Dayal de Castaka.
13628 - Birth of the Mono-Duchess Antigréa de Castaka.
13637 - Our universe officially joins the Confederation of Parallel Universes. Post-logic Era.
13645 - Birth of Myrtha and Narda.
13651 - The Techno-Guild discovers Central Planet and becomes the pan-Techno Church.
13652 - Destruction of the planet Ahour, original Castaka home.
13660 - Arrival of surviving members of the Castaka clan to the planet Marmola. Death of the Mono-Duchess Antigréa de Castaka. Contact with the Gargale Gangez, and disappearance of the epiphyte cavern.
17789 - Third great galacto-barbarian invasion lead by aliens.
17790 - Escape of the Imperial Couple to their cousins of the parallel universes. 5000 long years of continuous troubles.
23124 - First use of the Tri-H bomb and the end of the Pan-barbarian War.
23126 - Capture of power by the Techno-Technos. Fanatical Era.
23231 - Crowning of Magaella and Magellan, the new Trans-Bourbon Emperors.
23232 - The Techno-Technos are removed from political power circles.
23510 - The Church of Industrial Saints (C.I.S.) becomes the official cult of the Human Empire.
23511 - Secession between the Techno-Pope and the Techno-Popess. Creation of the Shabda-Oud order.
23772 - The Techno-Technos finish the construction of the "Great Network."
24000/29892 - Colonization to the borders of the universe.
29820 - Birth of Non-Baron Berard de Castaka.
29857 - Birth of Metabaron Othon von Salza.
29861 - Birth of Edna Berard de Castaka.
29872 - Birth of Honorata.
29876 - Birth of Barri de Castaka.
29892 - Death of Non-Baron Berard de Castaka. Death of Edna Berard de Castaka. Battle of Marmolla. The Human Empire learns of epiphyte. The Human Universe enters the Anti-G Era. Arrival of survivors of the Castaka clan on the planet Okhar. Death of Barri de Castaka. Construction of the Metacraft.
29893 - Birth of Metabaron Aghnar von Salza.
29899 - Birth of the Supra-Princess Oda the Capricious.
29900 - Construction of the Metabunker. Destruction of the planet Okhar. The Metabaron Othon and his son, Aghnar, take refuge on the planet Perdita.
29913 - Death of the Metabaron Othon von Salza. Destruction of the Shabda-oud order by the Metabaron Aghnar.
29918 - Death of the Supra-Princess Oda, but reincarnated by Honorata.
29919 - Birth of the Metabaron Steelhead.
29931 - Birth of Doña Vicenta Gabriela de Rokha.
29951 - Immemorial combat between the Metabaron Aghnar and Steelhead, followed by the death of Aghnarand Honorata.
29952 - The Metabaron Steelhead becomes Melmoth de Castaka. Birth of the Metabaron Aghorha de Castaka and the cast of Castaka. Death of Doña Vicenta Gabriela de Rokha.
29969 - Death of the Metabaron Steelhead.
29970 - Birth of the current Metabaron, who has no name.
29989 - Death of the Metabaron Aghorha de Castaka.
30000 - Current epoc.

enforcers, the Empire nonetheless can make its intentions felt throughout the mass of galaxies that make up the universe. Even black holes perceived in the farthest distance by telescopes are claimed for the Empire, just as long ago, on Terra Prima, the new lands across the seas were claimed by the monarchs who owned the largest navies.

Magaella and Magellan's era will forever be remembered as the era of riches and technological marvels. In spite of its return to favor through diplomatic means, the Techno-Pontificate continued to shroud its activities in mystery. Nonetheless, it also continued to make colossal and decisive contributions to the Imperial arsenal. The Endoguard's supremacy in space owed much to the technological marvels of the Techno-Technos. In that respect, the discovery of epyphite is a perfect example of the state of the Human Empire of that time. Never had any faction been so powerful (powerful to the point of open rebellion against the Imperial Couple), never had opulence been so apparent everywhere, never had the thirst for riches been so keen, never had the promises of tomorrow been so glorious and numerous, and never had conspiracies been woven with so much fervor. It was at that time, in one of the extremely short periods in an alternating cycle of joy and tragedy that Magaella and Magellan, the Imperial twins, met their death. In 31184 to be precise, after the epyphite discovered in 29892 had increased their already immeasurable power, after the joy of childbirth had been granted them, after they had managed to repel the merciless Pthagurean attack, their lives were brutally taken. To this day, they are the only representatives of the Trans-Bourbon line for whom formal proof of actual death exists.

And thus, a new era was born.

In Our Time…

After that, the Emperoress Janus-Jana became ruler of the Empire. Fruit of the union between one of Empress Magaella's ova and one of Emperor Magellan's sterile sperm, Janus-Jana was brought into the world by thirty years of tireless work by the whole army of surgeon-robots and human doctors of the Hospital Planet. Superior mutant, a sublime combination of male heir and female heir, Janus-Jana was a Siamese twin, man and woman joined at the neck and shoulders. In that respect, He-She carried on the mystical tradition of the Trans-Bourbons, by approaching the original ideal of the first Dauphin. All the same, Janus-Jana did not even slightly suspect that He-She would never attain the sacred ideal of a union that combined the double aspect of male and female in one perfectly realized being. Janus-Jana was not the Sacred Androgyne. However, He-She was no ordinary human either. As the last of the line, He-She was the bearer of ancient wisdom and the possessor of immense power.

After Magaella and Magellan had their minds devoured by brain-eating vampires from interspace, the Emperoress became master of all the galaxies. Since then, sealed off from the human world by a protective egg, Janus-Jana rules the universe.

The Exercise & Structure of Imperial Power

Although the power of the Emperoress is not, strictly speaking, of divine essence, it undeniably bears a certain super-human aspect, if only by virtue of the prophecy from the dawn of time which foretold the coming of a perfect double being who would rule over the entirety of worlds.

This prophecy was so widely known that even the witches of the Shabda-Oud devised an ambitious and Machiavellian plot, ordering one of their number, the exquisite Honorata, to bear a hermaphroditic child to be proclaimed "Sacred Androgyne, Emperoress of the galaxy." However, their plan was doomed to fail, simply because Honorata's love for Othon, the first Metabaron, compelled her to choose to give him a son rather than a child of double sex. But the Shabda-Oud did not give up quietly. Far from being discouraged by their initial setback, they contrived another plot. This time it would involve combining Oda's genes with those of their god, Jejoh the perfect, to give birth to a hermaphroditic Chosen One who would dethrone Janus-Jana and confer supreme power to the order of Whore-Priestesses. This second attempt also met with failure. Still, the perseverance they showed demonstrates how the Sacred Androgyne's power is envied by all. With that in mind, it is easy to imagine that the witches of the Shabda-Oud were not the only ones to expend such efforts, and that other clans and interested parties plotted in the shadows to produce their own hermaphroditic Chosen One in their quest for supreme power.

Utterly isolated in His-Her palace on the Golden Planet, the Emperoress reigns as absolute ruler over the whole human galaxy. With a dictatorial temperament, He-She grants audiences in an immense throne room whose floor and walls are completely covered in fine gold. His-Her word is law, and His-Her decisions irrevocable. In one instant, He-She can decide the fate of a person, a race, a whole system, or even a galaxy. He-She not only holds but embodies power, and His-Her life is a constant battle to maintain it. Since His-Her accession, the Human Universe has never been so mighty, and yet never so divided either. Using the isolation of their distant territories to their advantage, the larger Noble Houses have accumulated tremendous military strength, of course still not mighty enough to challenge the Endoguard, but nonetheless of sufficient potency to give pause and bring considerable weight to the strategic balance. Quite fortunately for Janus-Jana, the Houses continually dispute among themselves and therefore remain utterly incapable of joining forces to overthrow Him-Her. The High Council of Nobles is not an upper-class salon where subdued remarks are exchanged among people of good company. Instead, it is more frequently a hotbed of open conflict.

Despite His-Her illustrious ascendancy, Janus-Jana also boasts a legitimacy much more solid than mere prophecy. By right, He-She is the direct descendant of the Imperial Couple, and no practical-minded person would dare to openly challenge the situation as it now stands. However, at a time when power-hungry factions are secretly lend-

ing their support to incessant wars, His-Her birthright does not protect Him-Her from intrigue, or the risk of impeachment. But in order to preserve the throne, He-She can count on the immediate assistance of an inner circle of allies, otherwise known as the Council.

The Council

Head of Imperial Protocol, Neo-Jester Vico da Sangle

Private councilor to the Emperoress, under the title of Head of Imperial Protocol, Vico da Sangle holds an enviable position of strategic power in the bosom of the Empire. He boasts no particular prerogatives, but nonetheless takes full advantage of his control over rules of decorum. Never has there been a man at Court more familiar with the rules of etiquette, and it has happened more than once that a haughty representative of a Noble House has been forced to swallow his pride in the face of da Sangle's demands. On matters of customs and rites, Janus-Jana always defers to his judgment and often immediately endorses any new rules of etiquette that da Sangle invents without hesitation, since their only aim is to amplify His-Her grandeur even more. At the same time, Vico da Sangle knows how to curry the Imperial favor. His greatest strength, the secret asset that grants him the right to Janus-Jana's ear, is his ability to make people laugh. For Vico da Sangle is a peerless acrobat and a juggler more skilled than any the human galaxy has ever seen. In his dexterous hands, some twenty rubber balls might fly by and rapidly rebound, seemingly possessed with a life of their own. His extraordinary routines literally astound anyone who has the good fortune to witness them. The graceful arcs he describes through the air, his well-timed tumbles and reckless acrobatics, are immensely fascinating and also very relaxing.

He frequently offers his opinion on a number of issues and provides advice in the guise of short poems, which he sings out while performing his tricks before an audience eager for his talents. He doesn't involve himself in strategy but instead is content to keep his finger on the pulse of the galaxy. As an example, see the margin on pages 28–29, which is a complete transcription of remarks exchanged during the course of an audience given by Janus-Jana in the Golden Palace (recorded by the Skribb sub-program, authorization number 359tek55862).

Despite the role of jester he plays before the Court with light and seemingly unconcerned tones, Vico da Sangle's influence must above all not be underestimated. Not only do his remarks always demonstrate a good deal of common sense, but he also manages, by his bold exploits, to defuse tense situations by bringing the hypocrisy of the courtesans to light, and he can snare even the most sophisticated in the trap of their own petty arguments.

The Circle of Imperial Mentreks

A closed and extremely secret occult group, the Circle of Imperial Mentreks do not have any direct influence over the Empire, but their strategic impact is so great that their mark is found on most decisions of multigalactic scope. They influence Imperial policy with their advice and counsel. If prognostic analysis allows them to demonstrate a specific interest in carrying out a forceful strike in any given zone of the universe, their recommendations invariably lead to action. The Endoguard presence in a particular sector is increased, peace-keeping missions are undertaken, surveillance of the Empire's enemies is carried out, and any faction headed for potential rebellion is quickly subjugated. "Good government is good planning," the old saying goes, and planning is precisely what the Circle of Imperial Mentreks contribute to Janus-Jana. To be sure, none of the Mentreks are endowed with clairvoyance, but the accuracy of their prognostic analyses make them indispensable to anyone who wishes to clearly understand the tangled skein of the threads of possibility. All in all, they provide a rational framework for Imperial decisions.

In terms of the structure of their clan, the Circle of Imperial Mentreks is only the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, these few visible members draw upon support from a much larger group, a vast college of more than a thousand Mentreks who contemplate an infinite number of problems, within the serene silence of their lair. The ten oldest and most esteemed Mentreks, the members of the Circle, eliminate the tangential considerations in order to convey a condensed synthesis of their analysis to Janus-Jana, who immediately translates it into action. Thanks to their role, the ten Mentreks of the Circle are honorary members of the Court. Indeed, is there any courtesan who hasn't seen their thin silhouettes slowly traversing the corridors of the Golden Palace? They are permitted certain privileges by their status. Their habits and little eccentricities are tolerated. One of them, who lived to the age of 275 standard years, a lifespan that stands unmatched to this day, will be renowned throughout history for his gluttony. To satisfy his cravings, the

The Dehumanization of the Mentreks

The Mentreks' formation process involves, in addition to games and simulations aimed at increasing each individual's potential tenfold, the removal of the portion of the brain that manages purely human reactions and sensations to exterior stimuli. Once created, Mentreks think and react like machines — probability computers who serve as the Emperoress's logistical arm. However, numerous accidental incidents and omissions have resulted from the Mentrek's purely technical decision-making process. For example, a Mentrek in charge of evaluating an expedition for the confines may thoroughly go over and elaborate every last technical detail for the expedition, while forgetting to foresee the necessary essentials for the bio-passengers.

Imperial House regularly shipped in large quantities of sugary tumors that grow on the faces of inhabitants of a tiny planet in a faraway sub-system, said to be true delicacies. But such exceptions are rare, and the lifestyle within the College itself is much more monklike. The thousand Mentreks who work there are the undisputed elite of their clan. Their value, graded on the FishKarov scale, reaches unsurpassed limits. Their astounding capacity for analysis is far beyond the abilities of humans.

Since the Mentreks exist only for the exercise of their intellect, some of them have developed an excessive taste for indirect action, for subtle combinations on various levels, or for any practical application of the domino effect. The Mentreks of the College, even the Mentreks of the Inner Circle, are dissatisfied with their classification and are aware that elsewhere in the universe, other less formidable Mentreks under contract to well-reputed Houses enjoy the luxury of being able to put their stratagems into practice. Sometimes, therefore, the Mentreks of the College succumb to certain attempts of undue influence, such as the introduction of new parameters to a given premise. This is not for the sake of personal ambition, but for the love of highly developed combinations, for the beauty of perfectly executed complex plans, and the self-serving pleasure of secretly undermining a plot of one of their brother Mentreks. Clearly, although the Mentreks' loyalty to the Empire is absolutely unquestionable, their taste for intellectual competition can risk becoming too intense.

Goyo-Vah, the Neo-Tarologist

Another mysterious character is Goyo-Vah, who plays a discreet but pivotal role in the Court. This shadowy advisor to Janus-Jana is the only living person whose remarks have ever impelled the Emperoress to rethink a position or even reverse a decision, indeed even making amends. Of the primary circle of councilors, only Goyo-Vah's words carry a powerful and almost supernatural aura, which commands obedience. In short, if Vico da Sangle's function is to entertain while creating a screen that filters out the unwanted, and if the function of the Circle of Imperial Mentreks is to evaluate, speculate, and analytically justify the validity of Imperial strategies, Goyo-Vah's role is to bring a flash of clarity to any clouded situation.

Trained in the subtle arts of Paleo-Tarot and Grandmaster of the Arcana of Neo-Tarot, Goyo-Vah is one of the four known Neo-Tarologists in the entire universe and doubtlessly the most powerful. The doorways of divination were opened to him by the insertion of 78 metallic panels into his brain. Each panel has been tipped with a drop of holy Golden Oil, which augments his neural hyper-conductivity and gives him access to alternate temporal dimensions. Of course, the installation of the implants was a delicate and dangerous process, but once Goyo-Vah's brain managed to overcome the shock, a new dimension spread its arms before him.

Since that time, he exists simultaneously on two levels of reality. In terms of perception, he sees, hears, and feels all that everyone else can see, hear, and feel. But he also discerns an almost superimposed second layer, which filters his perception of the present by tinting it with tones of the future. What will be, or what could be, appears before him. The various colors of the spectrum correspond to the different Arcana, and their intensity is proportional to the probability of their occurrence. The readings depend on individual interpretation, but a true craftsman can easily translate these impressions and supra-sensory readings into tangible facts.

Goyo-Vah uses two principal methods to determine a course of events. Continually, instant by instant, the possible outcomes of all situations he sees, reads, and imagines, including those that are brought before him, imperceptibly impose themselves onto the mass of information contained in his unconscious mind. If he fixes his mind on one detail, he can probe all its facets at his leisure, and identify the chances of seeing it develop within a specific context to a very slim margin of error. On the other hand, Goyo-Vah can also immerse himself in a deeper and more thorough study of a group of facts. It's not unusual for Janus-Jana to bring him the results of His-Her Mentreks' analysis, so he can pass them through the screen of his own predictive method. In either case, whether he provides intuitive flashes or meticulous extrapolations, Goyo-Vah is a valuable asset that the Emperoress would not know how to do without.

Of course, the reading of the Arcana is not infallible. Absolute prescience is not Goyo-Vah's gift, and it sometimes occurs that reality stubbornly refuses to follow the path it should. That possibility is even more likely given a situation with a large number of unknowns, or when the parameters in question are complex or poorly correlated. For in the underhanded battles between the powers of the Empire, many situations are murky. But aside from these pitfalls and gray areas where the outlines of the future are not at all clear, Goyo-Vah's visions provide an idea of the direction in which the course of things may flow.

The Neo-Tarologists

Though the names of the four Neo-Tarologists are known, these exceptional beings remain for the most part as inaccessible as the Techno-Technos' jealously guarded secrets. Thus, the illustrious Goyo-Vah, cloistered on Golden Planet, and Occiputal-Cogito, protected by the impenetrable Central Planet defense systems, are cut off from all contact with humanity. It is possible to approach Raymonde and the Ruby, who sells her divinatory services to the elite of the Archi-nobles at prohibitive prices, but only Renovalh, the entity deified by the mutants on Planet Novahl-Ré, can still be approached by common mortals.

The Golden Palace

Erected atop the highest point of the Golden Planet's level surface, the Golden Palace is a splendid and massive golden edifice that stretches its proud colonnades up towards the infinite cosmos. Located in the center of a vast golden court made of thirty-foot-wide square slabs, the palace houses a throne room for the Emperoress to grant audiences and an infinite amount of chambers dedicated to various pursuits. Beneath the court and the audience hall, as if embedded in this precious golden jewel, lie the Emperoress's private apartments, as well as a private hearing room, with occasional privilege of entry granted only to a few rare councilors. A veritable golden cathedral supported by massive pillars, the audience hall has a wide circle of light gold in its center, set within a seven-pointed dark gold star. The tip of one of the points marks the entrance to the hall. On each side of the hall, long rows of terraces accommodate the thousands of courtesans who attend the Imperial audiences every day. The Imperial throne sits between the two points of the star that face the entrance. It is a platform reached by climbing three long flights of stairs, topped by a huge triangular structure, which holds Janus-Jana's protective egg. Here beats the heart of the Empire, where all Imperial decisions are made, and from whence the Endoguard sets out to bear the colors of the Empire across the whole universe.

Impregnable Golden Planet

The aura of terror and mystery that suffuses Golden Planet is not just due to its superstitious population and their sense of mysticism. There exists a more concrete explanation. Reputed to be unassailable and impenetrable, the political and administrative heart of the Empire is surrounded by nine satellites — artificial and semi-artificial — each containing a veritable arsenal of radar, sensors, probes, and frequency emitters that permanently sweep a security perimeter around the planet that is several thousand light years wide. This barrier prohibits all classical means of space-flight approach and landing, and equally scans the parallel dimensions, in order to prevent any threat that could be metahuman in nature. An immediate sanction of pure and simple destruction is ordered for all intrusions unauthorized by Imperial mandate.

Entrance to the audience hall is via an immense doorway made of an impenetrable alloy of white Netranekkon and gold. The top portion of the Golden Palace rotates constantly, its door only opening when it returns to a certain position four times a year at 61-day intervals, since a year lasts 244 standard days. The courtesans who live inside the Golden Palace can then emerge, immediately replaced by other nobles desiring to make their way into the Court.

Except during specific periods of galactic urgency, the rulers of the Empire never leave the Golden Palace. For example Magaella and Magellan, parents of Emperoress Janus-Jana, only once visited Marmola, and once boarded the Diplomatic Vessel during the galactic crisis with the Pthagureans, although unfortunately this incident is what led to their death. However, the top portion of the Golden Palace can transform into the Golden Vessel, which allows the Emperoress to depart at any given moment for any point in the universe.

As inviolable and impregnable as it is, the Golden Palace has nonetheless suffered the humiliation of assault on several occasions. First came Othon, who eliminated the Imperial Couple's private guard before clearing a path through the door's supposedly indestructible mass with a simple gesture that summoned a burst of pure energy capable of detonating a planet. Later, Steelhead unleashed absolutely incomprehensible forces in order to create the Golden Flower. Acting under an irresistible current, the whole top portion of the Golden Planet split open to reveal a crown of eight petals, which spread like a young blossom under a sun's warm caress. No hull or shield could resist it. Then, Steelhead directed his effort downwards, making a shaft in the ground that tunneled to the very depths of the palace's inviolable heart.

The day of the Golden Flower would remain forever in memory as the day of the greatest imaginable affront to the Empire, but paradoxically also a day that strengthened the unspoken and almost spiritual bond between the Emperoress and the Metabaron, greatest of all His-Her warriors.

Beneath the palace runs an immense and almost unnavigable network of corridors, galleries, and passageways. They provide access to the apartments of nobles allowed at Court; to service buildings where armies of robo-servants, robo-cooks, and robo-chambermaids bustle about; to the quarters of the Supreme Endoguard; to the Golden Palace's official prison that sometimes contains nobles who have been condemned in plenary assembly; and to unofficial dungeons where certain poor fallen courtesans rot away. An infinity of other passageways connect to great halls, small rooms, offices, cellars, and corridors that lead to unknown points of various usefulness. The sense of enormity and lavishness of decoration are such that an inattentive explorer would inevitably go astray. Such a structure calls into question the mental health of the architect who designed it. The only thing for certain is that there are many secret doorways and passageways here

The Armed and Administrative Branches of the Empire

The inner circle of councilors generate and refine the broad strokes of Imperial strategy, which is then put into effect by the administrative branch of the Empire — the StellComm, and vigilantly enforced by the armed branch — the Endoguard. Thus the Emperoress has two ultra-powerful divisions entirely devoted to His-Her cause.

Their devotion does not spring from freely given loyalty, which would always be at risk of retraction, but from much more powerful forces: fear and subjugation. Indeed, the mighty Endoguards are made to comply with Imperial directives by a technical device, while StellComm agents comply with their orders for the sake of preserving their lives.

The StellComm

The Imperial Super-Ministry of Stellar Commerce (or StellComm as it's more often called) organizes and regulates trade and commercial travel throughout the universe. In theory, it puts the framework and general rules for commercial activity into place and then ensures their maintenance by collaborating with the Maganats and other intergalactic authorities, such as the Guild of Imperial Merchants or the traders of the Ekonomat.

In practice, it primarily fulfills the duties of customs, maintaining offices and delegations in all the universe's cosmoports. It controls the movement of merchandise and of course collects taxes for the Imperial treasury. However, it also carries out other useful functions, such as developing and carrying out security routines for subatmospheric space and zones around cosmoports, administering and maintaining hyperspatial routes and astrographic data, signposting and mapping the sectors adjacent to inter-stellar wormholes, and handling all of the Empire's administrative needs: registration, inspection of vessels and cargo, and so on.

In local areas, particularly in minor systems or ones somewhat isolated from the more heavily trafficked routes, it is customary for StellComm agents to be more lenient and more sympathetic to the grievances and demands from representatives of the Maganats or Colonials, independent shippers, or even pioneers who head off on exploratory missions to return with their holds full of mineral ore. In such cases, negotiation might be considered, unless of course an Endoguard patrol is passing somewhere nearby.

For its missions, StellComm can call upon a fleet of modestly armed vessels. There is no guarantee of safety in outer space. However, their armament does not permit them to take on aggressors above a certain level of firepower, since StellComm agents are administrators more than warriors. In case of difficulty, the Endoguard is called in, and if they arrive on the scene in time, they will effortlessly turn the battle in their favor.

Parallel to their duties in the field, the hundreds of millions of StellComm agents spread throughout the universe (customs and security inspectors, pilots, security agents who guard the warehouses, various levels of office staff, and others) work in some aspect of handling the astronomical quantities of data generated each day by interstellar commerce. And, nearer to the central power of the Golden Planet, the high-ranking officers in the StellComm are entrusted with making sure that the Emperoress's will is respected and converted into daily action for their ranks of administrators.

The Human Administration

Principle organ of logistic management for the Empire, StellCom centralizes the activities of tens of thousands of men and women whose behavior is characterized principally by being... human. While the Endoguards distinguish themselves with their implacable and mechanical efficiency, the StellCom agents are capable of dialogue, compromise, the ability to listen, and even of being corrupted. The rigidity of their administrative function is generally enough to dissuade them from making "friendly agreements"; however, they remain the only governmental agents who are willing to accept a bribe.

StellCom Agents

These generic characters can be used with the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*.

Inspector. *Agility 2D: dodge 3D, firearms 3D. Knowledge 3D: bureaucracy 4D, business 4D, intimidation 4D, secruity regulations 3D+2. Mechanical 2D. Perception 3D+2: bargain 4D, investigation 4D+2, search 4D+2. Strength 2D. Technical 3D: computer interface/repair 3D+2, security 3D+2. Psionics 0D.* Move 10. Character Points 1. Equipment: Defense pistol (3D damage), fine uniform, hand vid-comm, io board.

Pilot. *Agility 2D: firearms 3D, 0-G maneuver 4D. Knowledge 2D: astrography 4D, bureaucracy 4D, secruity regulations 2D+2. Mechanical 3D+2: astro-nav 5D+1, comm 5D+1, gunnery 4D+1, piloting 6D+2, sensors 5D, shields 5D, vehicle operations 5D. Perception 3D. Strength 2D. Technical 3D+2: computer interface/repair 4D, flight systems repair 6D. Psionics 0D.* Move 10. Character Points 1. Equipment: Defense pistol (3D damage), flight suit, pilot's helmet (+1 STR to resist damage; head only), io board.

Security. *Agility 4D: dodge 5D, firearms 5D, melee combat 5D, 0-G maneuver 4D+1. Knowledge 3D: bureaucracy 4D, intimidation 4D+2, secruity regulations 6D. Mechanical 2D+2: exoskeleton operation 3D. Perception 3D: search 4D+1. Strength 2D. Technical 2D: security 3D. Psionics 0D.* Move 10. Character Points 2. Equipment: Viper pistol (4D damage), stun baton (5D stun damage), uniform, comm headset, io board.

Clerk. *Agility 2D: dodge 3D. Knowledge 4D: bureaucracy 5D+2, business 6D, cultures 4D+1 secruity regulations 4D+1. Mechanical 2D. Perception 3D+2: bargain 4D+2, con 4D, search 4D+1. Strength 2D. Technical 2D. Psionics 0D.* Move 10. Character Points 1. Equipment: fine uniform, hand vid-comm, io board.

The Endoguard

The Endoguard makes up the armed branch of the Empire. It is the most solid, most visible, most feared, and also certainly the most loyal group to the Emperoress (ex-

cept for their transgression at Marmola, the causes and mechanics of which are ill-understood to this day). Not only is its firepower, thanks to technological support from the Techno-Technos, absolutely unrivalled across the entire universe, it also counts on utter ruthlessness and total self-sacrifice from each of its men, every one of them prepared to consent to the final sacrifice. For an Endoguard, the idea of dying for the Empire is neither a contract nor a choice, but simply a given fact technologically implanted in his brain. Death is not significant and certainly not a personal matter. It might be considered a professional error, a failing in the eyes of the Empire if the mission is compromised, but the ranks of the Endoguard are so tight that the disappearance of an individual goes unnoticed.

Not including the Supreme Endoguard — an elite corps providing tight security around the Golden Planet, the Golden Palace, and the Emperoress Him-Herself — the Endoguard comprises various specialized units. However, each individual Endoguard boasts multiple specialties. Indeed, through the course of his training, he not only of course learns to fight (they are experienced warriors in all known forms of combat) but also learns to use all available techniques and technology, to execute all applications of military engineering normally reserved for specially assembled divisions, and to handle all imaginable materials. Everything is done to make him the ultimate specialist, devoid of all scruples or emotional limitations, optimized for his mission: conquest and the enforcement of Imperial order.

Given the immensity of the Empire, the Endoguard cannot be everywhere. Nevertheless, it maintains permanent patrols around strategic points and major worlds. In these zones, the slightest alert given by a StellComm agent triggers armed intervention with the briefest possible delay. In more remote areas, such as those around the minor, outlying Maganat or Colonial planets that are more distant or less endowed with natural resources, the local forces alone are responsible for police operations. But if the disturbances are of a significant nature, such as a pirate raid or invasion by galacto-barbaric hordes, the Endoguard is dispatched immediately. Depending on the time required to arrive at the theater of operations, the purple lancets might well arrive in the middle of the action, in which case they restore order very swiftly. But it sometimes happens that they arrive a bit too late, and the entire battle zone is nothing but smoking ruins. In that case, the Endoguard carries out punitive action, which is followed through until retaliation has been made.

The Senate

Although the inner circle of councilors help Him-Her develop the broad strokes of Imperial strategy, the Emperoress exercises power through the intermediary of the four Great Pillars, which together make up the Senate: the Techno-Pontificate, the Maganats, the Ekonomat, and the Union of Planets. Although each one of these branches acts in accordance with Imperial will, it must never be forgotten that their individual interests are in almost constant opposition. Behind their obedience and their facade of submission, they are primarily there to serve their own ambitions. Nevertheless, thanks to the apt counsel of the Imperial Mentreks, and Goyo-Vah's prescient recommendations, Janus-Jana is able to maintain a delicate balance, ensuring that they all act towards His-Her greater glory.

The Meetings of the Senate

The plenary sessions of the Senate are held in the throne room of the Golden Palace. They are a forum for constant and merciless verbal jousting. The senators do not hesitate to mutually slaughter each other with their murderous proposals. But all their words, hurled with such conviction, are in vain. In reality, the Senate has no concrete power, and its function is merely one of appearance. The activity that takes place withing those walls has no other purpose besides contributing to a "circus of politics." Although the delegates defend their points of view with vigor and fire arguments and abuse, it's all for nothing, because in the end only the Emperoress decides.

Of course, they do form committees. Then, after endless round table discussions — which are merely a showcase for mind-numbingly vacuous speeches — reports are prepared, put to the criticism of the members, amended, and then finally approved. Janus-Jana never concerns Him-Herself with any of this. The Emperoress forms His-Her own opinion, enlisting no other aid besides the lucid analysis of His-Her Circle of Mentreks. But sometimes, He-She will take His-Her pleasure by watching the duels between the orators.

It might appear that the Senate has no other function than to serve as an echo chamber for verbal assault among the four Great Pillars. More importantly, however, it is a barometer that measures their relative influence in the Empire.. And although the endless speeches are mostly useless, the prestige they confer on whoever speaks loudest and longest is powerful and permanent. Although the delegates may attack each other while in session with bitter and cutting words, they bend over backwards outside the throne room to impress Janus-Jana and attract His-Her favor. In the final analysis, the Senate has no democratic legitimacy; it does not make any rulings, nor does it contributeanything to the process of government. It is an arena where the Techno-Pontificate, the Maganats, the Ekonomat and the Union of Planets all battle for a snippet of influence beneath the amused eye of Janus-Jana. Janus-Jana might well concede certain privileges to one or the other of the four Pillars in turn. This group will then immediately take advantage of the limelight, increasing their lobbying efforts. But their glory is short-lived, and the pillar that is favored today might fall into disrepute tomorrow. The so-called circus of politics is a cruel game, but all too often everyone forgets that it's a game.

Whatever action it may take, the fundamental motivation and indeed the very justification for the Senate's existence is that with every passing moment it reinforces the allegiance of the four Pillars to Janus-Jana's authority. By

the very fact that they hold sessions, and move heaven and earth to raise themselves in His-Her eyes, the TechnoPontificate, the Maganats, the Ekonomat and the Union of Planets continually confirm their submission to the Empire, at least on the surface. But the Emperoress is not so easily fooled. He-She knows that the obedience of the large clans is motivated solely by self-interest, which is precisely why He-She compels them to demonstrate, via the Senate, a public loyalty that they are far from swearing to Him-Her in private. For in the subtle game of power, the Empire must seize every opportunity to keep a tight rein on those who might one day rise against it.

The Confederation of Parallel Universes

In 13612, initial contact was made with the parallel universes who were concerned about all the agitation and unrest occurring at the edges of the confines, resulting in the Human Universe officially joining the Confederation of Parallel Universes in 13637. In 23124, after the explosion of the first Tri-H bomb, the Parallel Universes made their worry and disapproval known by rising up against these experiments "that were likely to cause cataclysms." This renewed contact was followed by intense diplomatic activity. The Empire quickly realized that it was in their interest to not ruffle the feathers of such powerful neighbors. Although initiates were already aware of the existence of parallel universes, it was this particular occasion that brought them into the public eye.

A permanent delegation from the Confederation of Parallel Universes was established in the Human Empire after the first series of diplomatic exchanges.

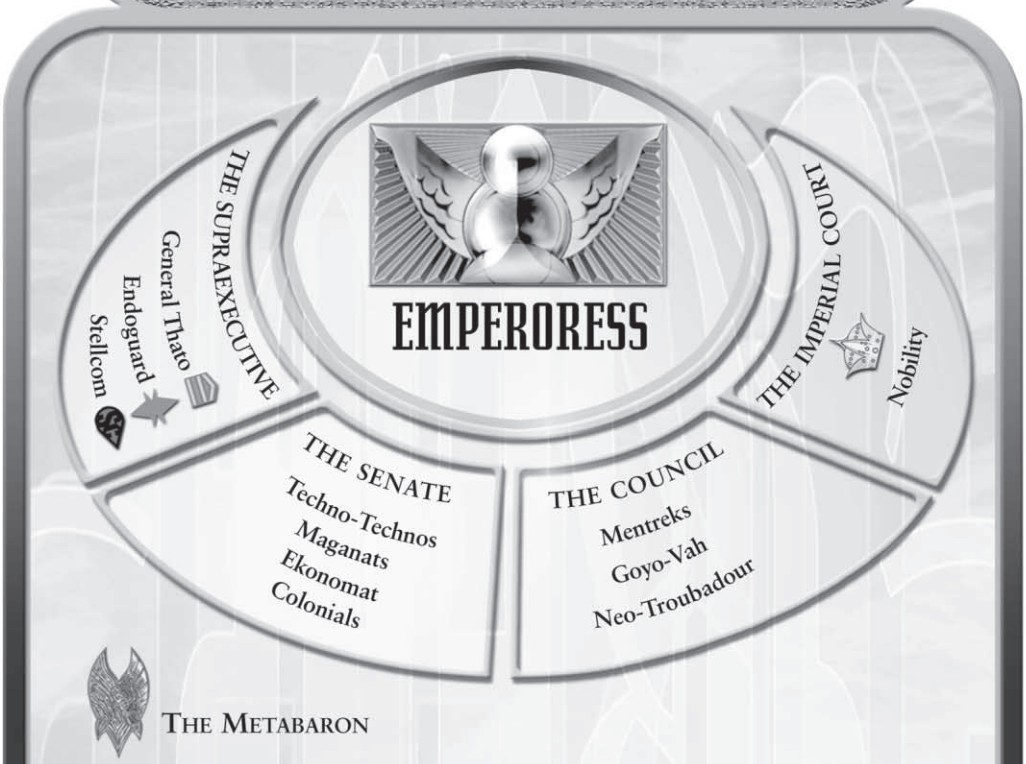
The delegation is based in the Golden Palace on Golden Planet. They have limited prerogatives, and essentially serve as a forum for discussion. Debates are courteous and polite, despite the oddity of the presence of visitors from the outer-universes.

A plenary session is organized every ten standard years, which is always the occasion for celebratory activities in the Imperial Palace. A setting of open exchange and negotiation, the Confederation of Parallel Universes could end up playing a larger role if by chance a conflict broke out in a zone of the confines, and threatened to spread further into the outer universes.

The Galacto-Barbarian Hordes

Like the coming and going of the seasons with births, deaths, destruction, and rebuilding of life, the Empire and human civilizations have suffered and con-tinue to suffer the surprise onslaughts of the hordes coming from the confines. The very first encounter with the galacto-barbarians (also known as the Wild Bunch) took place during the reign of Rosemonde I the Rebis. The attacks not only tore apart the Empire's relative tranquility but were repeated cyclically, becoming a dreaded reality of life in the Empire, which had to be accepted despite the lack of under-standing of the invader's origins and motivations. All that was known was that a real danger of extraterrestrials with shady desires existed. The invaders came from remote areas of space, and they regularly federated themselves around a war chief in order to sweep through the Empire. Today, after three major assaults, which are recorded in the historical archives as «the most barbarian galactic wars in all of history, this non-human pres-ence remains tangibly present at the outskirts of certain confines. Accounts from space voyagers mention relatively peaceful people with tribal habits and customs qualified as "paleo-barbarian." It is only their inclination to unite themselves at regular intervals in order to raid and plunder inhabited planets located hundreds of light years from their world, that seems to represent a real menace to the Empire.

Organization of Imperial Power



The Metabaron

Techno-Technos

Composition:
- Merchants
- Technicians
- Scientists
- Transporters

Possessions:
- 40% (increasing) of major worlds (Endocities).
- Central Planet
- War Star Mercenary Training
- Planet Hospital Mentrek Training
- Interspatial Tunnels
- Imperial Merchants Guild

Military Forces:
- Techno-soldiers
- Techno-assassins

Financial Resources:
- 28% of G.U.P*

Maganats

Composition:
- Nobility

Possessions:
- 10% of major worlds
- Each great family possesses a Maganat (conglomerate of rich planets) that it manages as it fancies
- Certain Maganats are extremely industrialized (they manufacture equipment for the Endoguard)

Military Forces:
- Private guards
- Mercenaries

Financial Resources:
- 47% of G.U.P.*

Ekonomat

Composition:
- Bankers
- Traders

Possessions:
- 0.0001% of major worlds
- Banks
- Every financial transaction passes through the "hands" of a representative of the Ekonomat
- Secret of water

Military Forces:
- Corsairs (mercenaries)

Financial Resources:
- Empire's slush fund (% not calculated in the G.U.P*)

Colonials

Composition:
- Troglosocialiks
- Galactik-Mencheviks
- Trotsko-Revolutionary Avatars
- others

Possessions:
- 50% (decreasing) of major worlds
- Uncountable minor worlds

Military Forces:
- Colonials (very large military forces, but generally archaic equipment)

Financial Resources:
- 23% of G.U.P*

* Gross Universal Product

The Four Pillars

Within the colossal mosaic of peoples, cultural interests, clans, and individ-uals that make up the population of the Empire, there are four distinct groups that truly stand out from the rest. They are the four Pillars of the Empire. Because of their status, their demographic weight, and their geographic scope, they represent a powerful force. Ever present in the political machinations of the Empire, they hold session in the Senate, and even if the role of that organization is more honorific than strategic, the combined influence of the four groups cannot be ignored.

The Techno-Pontificate

A group so occult that it borders on a secret society, the Techno-Pontificate is both the Empire's worst enemy and the ally that contributes most to its glory. Although its secret ambition is to seize absolute power at any price, the Techno-Church also provides the Imperial armed forces with decisive technological support for their battles for power. The Emperoress is perfectly aware of the Pan-Techno threat, and it is not weakness that convinces Him-Her to tolerate their scheming. At the present time, the Techno-Technos are not yet powerful enough to submit the whole universe to their will, so they plot in the shadows and bide their time. And although the Emperoress warms this snake at His-Her breast, it is only in order to control it better. For this snake holds secrets without which the Empire would shine less brightly. The Techno-Church and the Empire have coexisted for ages, never entirely peacefully. After the Techno-Technos mastered the technology of Tri-H bombs during the surprise galacto-barbaric attacks of 23124, they attempted to overthrow Imperial authority and install a Techno-Regime throughout the entire universe. The Empire banished them for that offense, but a few centuries later, they returned to grace when Magaella and Magellan — the Imperial Couple at that time —bequeathed the Church of the Industrial Saints with the status of official cult in the human universe. After all, it would be folly to forsake any ally who controls a weapon capable of imploding the universe.

Despite its name, the Church of the Industrial Saints is not actually religious. Although they may preach to the masses — about the supremacy of technology, and the coming of the Darkness — they don't promise any happiness, either in this world or the next. They also observe rituals — primarily during services in their temples — but only in order to better control their flock. They are also constantly striving to attract new followers, whom they then convert with ease. Their structure is a replica of the Paleo-Catholicism of Terra Prima. A new Techno-Techno, once his spirit has been won over to the cause, desires only the coming of a new era, in which the black forces of the Darkness will rule the whole universe. More than a religion, the Techno-Techno Order is a tool of conquest, arranged in the form of a congregation.

Structure of the Church of the Industrial Saints

The Church of the Industrial Saints, also called the Magnus Dei, follows an extremely hierarchical pyramid structure. At its head is the Supreme Techno-Pope, religious and spiritual leader of the Church, ruler of the millions of souls over which he holds sway. Of course, the well-being of those souls is not his main concern. He is more interested in tightening his grip on the Empire by extending his tentacles and technological connections into every cranny. The Supreme Techno-Pope is selected from among the conclave of Techno-Popes, high leaders of the Church who rule the Endocities. Immediately beneath them in the hierarchy are the Techno-Cardinals and Techno-Bishops, representing the first line of the order's administrative machinery. They ensure that Techno-Techno catechism is firmly enforced. To that end, they oversee the actions of their Supreme Techno-Abbots, who work assiduously within the massive hives of industrial activity they call their Techno-Abbeys, to spread the Techno-Techno faith and develop ever more efficient machines and systems.

At the top, but invisibly, the Supreme Techno-Pope himself is subject to the authority of the Techno-Centrus and the Council of Circuits. Together, those two entities form the Techno-Sacerdota, a type of supervising intelligence whose

The Three Ophidian Entities

"Every 777 cycles, during the ritual coupling of the three Serpents, the three Supreme Ophidian Entities, during an act where two of them unite and the third dissolves into them, this absolute trinity gives birth to a third essence that, in the breath of a moment, reunites the male and female qualities of the other two, perfectly and intimately mixed, becoming the perfect monoic entity, granted all the virtues of the two principles." — Fragments of the fresque that decorates, in an unbroken line, the foundation stone of the Techno-Temple of Central Planet.

consciousness is as elusive as it is inflexible.

As the official religion of the Empire, the Techno-Church has no trouble constantly bringing new followers to the fold. Even the highest directors carry out their rites and religious duties in more or less good grace, and attendance at their Temples is maintained at a healthy average. However, for those who make a more serious commitment — usually beings without ties who see the Church as material to fulfill the hollow in their lives — the Techno-Techno grip soon resembles complete immersion in a religious cult. Body and soul, they become creatures of the Darkness.

Boasting billions of followers across the universe, the Techno-Church can call upon unlimited pools of manpower for any job. Their specialist Techno-monks are divided into the ranks of Techno-surgeons, Techno-obstetricians, Techno-urbanists, Techno-engineers, Techno-foremen, Techno-soldiers (or Techno-crusaders), Techno-economists, and other Techno-specialists. These active officers form the backbone of the Techno-Techno industry. In each field, they direct the action in the field of elemental nonspecialized units. The group of Techno-Technos at the bottom of the pyramid is called the Techno-Mano.

Although extremely discreet, the Techno-Church is nevertheless omnipresent. Only a few rare isolated planets, or particularly intractable Colonial planets, do not possess a Techno-Temple or even a Techno-Embassy. Out in space, there are numerous pan-Techno ships that streak through the cosmos, and each legal orbital station is a chapel in the order.

The Source of Techno-Techno Power

Formed around an ancient group of interstellar traders called the Merchants' Guild, the Techno-Church took on a new dimension in 13651, when the Central Planet was discovered. After that, those itinerants of the universe formed a common brotherhood, bound together by a strong sense of solidarity. The cosmos were still savage, and it was vital to be able to count on assistance from one's fellow man. Over time, the members of this community developed bizarre customs — signs of recognition and other secret rites, although without a mystical context. Little by little, these signs of group belonging and brotherhood among the interstellar merchants began to separate them from the rest of the world. The tendency towards segregation grew ever more pronounced, culminating in total dissociation between the guild and the rest of humanity. Of course, the merchants still had to conduct business, but any contact with someone who didn't belong to their fraternity was kept to a strict minimum.

Some time after the guild had become a true occult cartel, one of its vessels was forced to make a crash landing on a deserted asteroid in the middle of space. At first, the celestial body did not offer any hope to the survivors of the crash. After launching a distress call, they sat back and waited… for possible rescue, or death. After four standard days, their damaged ship's oxygen supply was exhausted, and the three survivors had to put on their spacesuits. Four hours of oxygen still remained. Resigned to their fate, but nonetheless spurred on by uncontainable curiosity, they set out to explore the naked gray surface of the asteroid, thinking only of finding their resting place for all eternity. There wasn't much to see on the blighted landscape, but behind a large straight rock that stood on the plain pointing up at the cosmos like a finger, they discovered a cleft leading to a vast underground chamber. A pure, undulating, snakelike curve ran along the entire length of the rocky wall. It seemed to have been engraved on that thick, rough surface with the aid of the finest possible laser imaginable. The sole opening led to a long hallway, which seemed to lead down into the heart of the rocky mass. Without pausing to consult each other, the three men started down the passageway. An orange light seemed to emanate from the floor and ceiling. After a slight bend, the incline became more pro-

The Order's Renegades

Quasi-religious, extremely hierarchical, and directed by the supernatural influence of the Ophidian Entities, the Techno-Techno order is far from being a mercenary guild where one can decide one day to leave its ranks, "no strings attached." The case of Marak Trankz is often cited as an example. This Terra 402 neuro-technician, who decided to leave the order to join the Amok forces, lived clandestinely for two years. Subject to fits of neurotic paranoia and uncontrollable hallucinations, he constantly imagined himself hunted down by legions of robo-trackers. He was later found in a Red Ring alley, gutted of all of his internal organs.

nounced. Their reserve tanks were nearly empty. They would leave this desolate world forever in one standard hour at the most. Nonetheless, they carried on resolutely. Long minutes ticked by. They advanced with increasing difficulty. A layer of thin mist settled across the visors of their space suits. The thought of an agonizing death hung over them.

Just as despair gently closed its talons over their will, they arrived in a crypt of gargantuan proportions. A strange light bathed this otherworldly and timeless place in phosphorescent shadows. Within the core of the rocky orb, a heart of the blackest darkness began to throb. Then they saw a writhing knot of reptilian bodies slowly begin to untangle, like a nightmare that presaged the horrors of hell. Paralyzed with fear, the three merchants watched the snakelike dance of the reptiles, all the more hypnotic in the echo of frozen silence. They felt they had been granted the honor of beholding the enigmatic face of death itself.

Their blood now carried a deadly amount of carbon dioxide. The three disentangled serpents slowly began to straighten. Sheathed in darkness, their bodies glimmered: silver, copper, and gold. Suddenly, a rush of life-giving oxygen flooded the suits of the merchants, and their energy was promptly restored, allowing them to witness the strange sight before their eyes. The chamber's walls were covered on all sides with hieroglyphic carvings, emulating the patterns on the reptilian scales. A feeling of hope swelled within them little by little, and they grew bolder. They approached the three reptiles, now as still as marble, noticing that their bodies were also tattooed with an intricate layer of cabalistic symbols. At once, they knew they were in the presence of a great mystery, an unfathomable secret with the power to change the universe.

Subsequently, the small asteroid was transformed. Today it is Central Planet, the seat of Techno-Techno power. Its original diameter of barely 5,000 kilometers has been enlarged to 77,777 kilometers. Now, it is an utterly impregnable base, one of the larger strongholds of the universe, capable of resisting anything and anyone, except of course Steelhead the Metabaron. The three Bodras, the serpents of copper, silver, and gold, still reside on the Central Planet in a cavern directly beneath the Techno-Temple's altar. The merchants, who later became Techno-Technos serving the Church of the Industrial Saints, received from them the secrets of a fabulous technology, doubtlessly originating in another universe. Today, the Magnus Dei not only holds countless patents over applications far superior to what human technology can produce, but also over the process of construction for the Endocities, a type of city-shaft. But that's not all. In 23124, the Techno-Technos developed and exploded the first Tri-H bomb, a formidable device that triggers a simultaneous sequence of cataclysms in three parallel universes. This ultimate weapon, capable on its own of bringing one or several universes to their knees, presents such a great threat that the Confederation of Parallel Universes forbids its use. More recently, the Techno-Church developed another lethal weapon, the negative-mine, which they use only sparingly, so as not to provoke envy. The mines set in motion a colossal chain of destruction that produces anti-matter. At the same time, the Church continues to work in other fields and strives endlessly to broaden its infinite network.

Spheres of Influence of the Church of the Industrial Saints

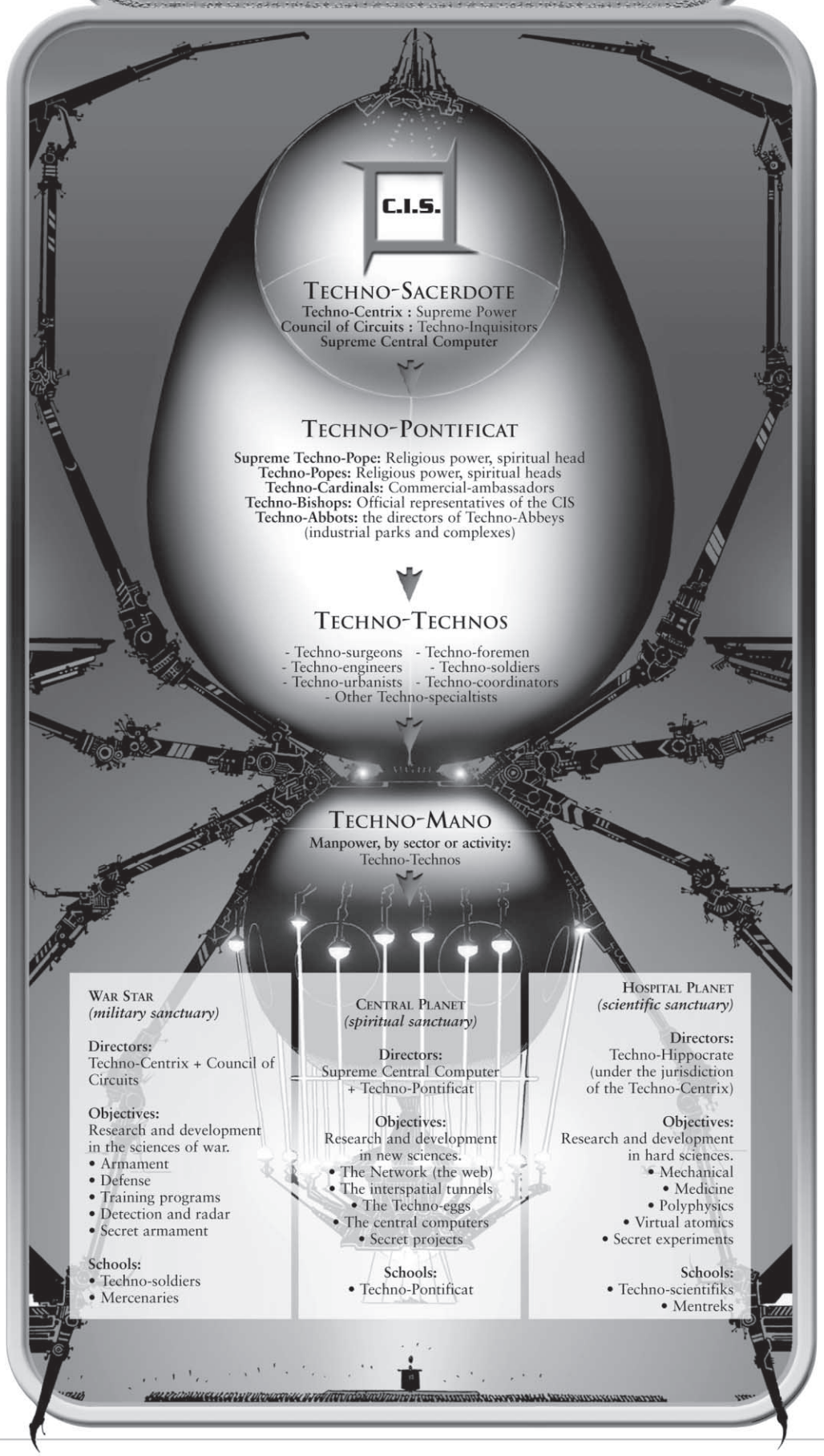
Wielding enormous power and capable of challenging the Empire itself were it not for the Metabaron, the Church of the Industrial Saints carries out massive activity in a multitude of areas. With technology as the backbone of all its enterprise, they have a total stranglehold on almost every activity linked to commerce, science, technology, and transportation. To a certain degree, they treat commerce and transportation as the same endeavor. The Techno-Tunnels — a network of interspatial highways without which the regions of the universe would forever be condemned to isolation — are the key for trade between the 22,000 major worlds and the infinite number of minor ones. As a result, they are also a keystone to interstellar transportation.

In the sphere of technical and scientific research and development, the Techno-Technos carry out innumerable experimental programs not only in the privacy of their factory-labs, but also within the Endocities, which are under their complete control. The theoretically free citizens who inhabit the Endocities are in fact under total and exclusive control of the Techno-Technos. These citizens may be subjects of the Emperoress, but the powers of the Golden Palace are not at all concerned with their fate. So it is with total impunity that the Magnus Dei conducts vast experiments on them, intended to extract the portion of human conscience they call the "K factor." A

The Council Circuit

One would tend to believe that the Supreme Techno-Pope is at the very top of the Church of the Industrial Saint's pyramid-structured hierarchy. The truth is, the Council Circuit, although hidden by the Tenebrae's diffused shadows and its obscure wishes, is the most powerful authority in the pan-Techno Church. Composed of Techno-inquisitors,the Council Circuit organizes itself around the Supreme Central Computer, and is under the direction of the Techno-Centrix, which only resides on Central Planet or War Star. Permanently linked to the Great Network, which guides them in their objective, the Techno-inquisitors make them-selves known to each other by showing their golden accreditation disk. They generally travel only in order to judge and eliminate enemies of the Order.

The Church of Industrial Saints



fundamental human drive of inestimable value to the Techno-Techno's objectives, the K factor's primary use is as fuel for the cold and inhuman mechanical systems. Thus, humans serve as paleo-guinea pigs for the machines that prey on them.

Aside from all the Endocities in the universe — 8,500 and counting — the Techno-Technos also own three major planets: Central Planet, War Star, and Hospital Planet. Their activities on those planets are shrouded in the total secrecy that characterizes their order and portends their greatness.

On Central Planet, the Techno-Church trains its officers, some in dogma, and some in attack and defense. In the first group are specialists of ritual, who will later be assigned to the ranks of the Techno-Inquisition. Unswerving on matters of doctrine, the Techno-inquisitors are in some ways the order's police force, but they also work to spread their faith in the outside world. As for the second group, they will join the Techno-Techno army, that vast organization made up of the Techno-soldiers (otherwise known as Techno-crusaders) but also the Techno-assassins, who carry out dirty deeds for the greater glory of the Magnus Dei.

On War Star, a tiny planet whose position is unknown to anyone, the Church of the Industrial Saints trains its mercenaries. It also keeps track of them and gives them assignments through the Central Mercenary Office. This regulatory body, apparently independent but actually controlled by the Techno-Technos, administers a test to the mercenary candidates for classification purposes, and acts as a center for offers of employment. Of course, the test for mastery of combat situations is administered by machine. After his virtual battle, each apprentice mercenary is given a rank, expressed in *Dhan,* the index of a mercenary's worth in battle.

Lastly, on Hospital Planet, the Church of the Industrial Saints provides training for their Techno-surgeons, who are quickly outfitted with so many mechanical attachments that they cease to be quite human. Somewhere in the vast area of the planet not dedicated to surgery, the Techno-Technos have also established the Mentrek Training Center.

Thus, the Techno-Techno order maintains a gargantuan presence in a number of key sectors. Their predilection for conspiracy and the tremendous means they possess at their disposal is a terrifying combination and gives rise to the suspicion that their ever increasing conquests will never end. That risk seems greater when one considers that the primary objective of the reptilian creatures who gave them their powers was absolute domination.

Kresus IV

Rare are those who are not aware of the Supreme Central Computer's existence, considered by many as the power behind the throne of the Church of the Industrial Saints. But there is another supra-computer, placed at the head of Ekonomat transactions, which seems to be as disconcerting to human spirits as the Techno-Technos' spying endeavors. The reinforced room that houses Kresus IV's circuits is in effect surrounded by an antimatter isolation casing that excludes all life, all atomic existence, and all links with the pan-Techno Great Network.

The Ekonomat

The Ekonomat is the only Pillar of the Empire whose discretion matches its power. In the Endocities, as well as on the planets of the Maganats and Colonials, it is rare indeed to find anyone who is even aware of its existence. Nobody admits to working for the Ekonomat. No offices or buildings of the Ekonomat are anywhere to be seen. Yet it is omnipresent, for it controls all financial transactions. In fact, even the tiniest banking agency in the smallest city on the most isolated planet forms part of the Ekonomat. But the Ekonomat also owns the universal network that manages the millions upon millions of accounts in the universe — and the millions upon millions of transactions that take place each standard day — as well as all the stock exchanges, specialized trust and investment societies, the portfolios of the wealthiest Maganats, and the financial assets of the Empire. It therefore possesses unimaginable influence. Not a single kublar in legal circulation throughout the universe escapes its notice.

History of the Ekonomat

The pathological secrecy of the Ekonomat, and the aura of dark mystery that shrouds its activities, are simply inherited responses to a long and troubled history. At the time of its origin, the Ekonomat did not represent a clan in the true sense of the word, or even a group of specific interests. In ancient times of life on Terra Prima, within every society and every population, there were people without title or official position who dealt in the trade of money. Universally despised, and sometimes even persecuted, they nevertheless lent vital support to the ambitions of those in power. Without them, the colossal sums required for campaigns of conquest could never have been raised, and no warlords could have forged their empires. But the business of money-lending comes with both a reward and a risk. By funding conquerors hungry for power and glory, they put themselves in a position to receive large fortunes but also to suffer disgrace. In defeat as well as in victory, nobody likes a man he owes money. Sometimes, society's latent hostility towards them reached frenzied heights, and they were threatened, attacked, and massacred indiscriminately.

When Earth's fickle history resulted in the near destruction of Terra Prima, they too were borne upon the screeching winds that thrust humans across the cosmos. Scattered to all corners of the universe, they steadily and secretly continued their activities. They never conquered planets or occupied high positions, but behind every warlord who set off to carve himself a piece of the galaxy was always a mysterious character with bizarre connections, capable of raising millions of Kublars at highly competitive rates. Over time, thanks to the military success of the warlords, they gained riches but never respectability. They remained outcasts in all societies, as if their financial abilities were some sort of shameful disease.

Once they became endowed with substantial means, this scattered culture embarked on a quest to find a world they could make their own, a virgin planet that would house the heart of their community. In great secrecy, dozens of exploratory vessels were prepared and then launched in all directions, searching for a new promised land isolated from the stellar trade routes. It was the *Xodus,* a decrepit but hardy vessel, that accidentally stumbled upon a vast planet, apparently uninhabited despite the presence of an atmosphere. Perfectly secluded, this new world was accessible from only one direction, protected on one side by an asteroid field and on the other by an immense gaseous cloud. Preliminary scans, carried out from high orbit, showed almost no bio-activity, or at least nothing that indicated the presence of any intelligent life. Cautiously, after many standard weeks of scrupulous observation, a landing probe was sent down. It confirmed the viability of the atmosphere, and revealed traces of a massive body of water that had disappeared. A landing team was dispatched, precisely into the zone that showed the greatest bio-activity.

To their great surprise, the landing team discovered only one life-from: a gigantic oyster endowed with telepathic abilities. The enormous mollusk, which had been trapped under a patch of dry sand for millennia, gave a warm welcome to the five members of the landing team, and began to narrate the tragic fate of its planet and its people. He told them he was named Bemb, that he was the sole survivor of a peace-loving race that had inhabited this once aquatic land, and that he had been appointed the chosen one who would await their arrival. Long ago, he told them, millions of shelled creatures lived here in harmony, in the clear waters of an immense ocean warmed by the rays of a loving sun. After a great disaster, the life-giving waters flowed away, down into the heart of the planet, condemning its inhabitants to certain death. He had been asked to act as a repository for his fellow creatures' memories, and immerse himself in total catalepsy to wait for intelligent life, in order to finally reveal their secrets.

Before succumbing to eternal sleep, Bemb revealed two things to these outcasts of civilization, forever reversing their fate and allowing the Ekonomat to take on the dimension it holds today. First, under the thin layer of dirt, the millions of oysters had, in death, left behind a mountain of pearls of incredible splendor and size, a fortune colossal enough to buy half the universe. But even more valuable, he added, was the power contained within his flesh — the power to accumulate and stockpile hydrogen and oxygen atoms by compressing them, in other words the ability to either produce or deconstruct water molecules on demand. With such a secret, it would be possible to hold an ocean within a paleothimble and transport it anywhere.

From that point on, the Ekonomat underwent an era of rapid expansion. Besides financial transactions, they took control of the trade in water, that essential commodity of life, which many worlds were forced to import in large quantities. Their massive assets only grew larger, and although their riches could never buy them an untarnished reputation, they gained the status of a clan that could not be ignored and whose wrath was to be feared. Today, the Ekonomat is a necessary participant in all economic transactions of a certain scope. It controls the universal network of banks and manages the assets of all the universe's wealthy, in order to generate profit.

The Scientific Chamber

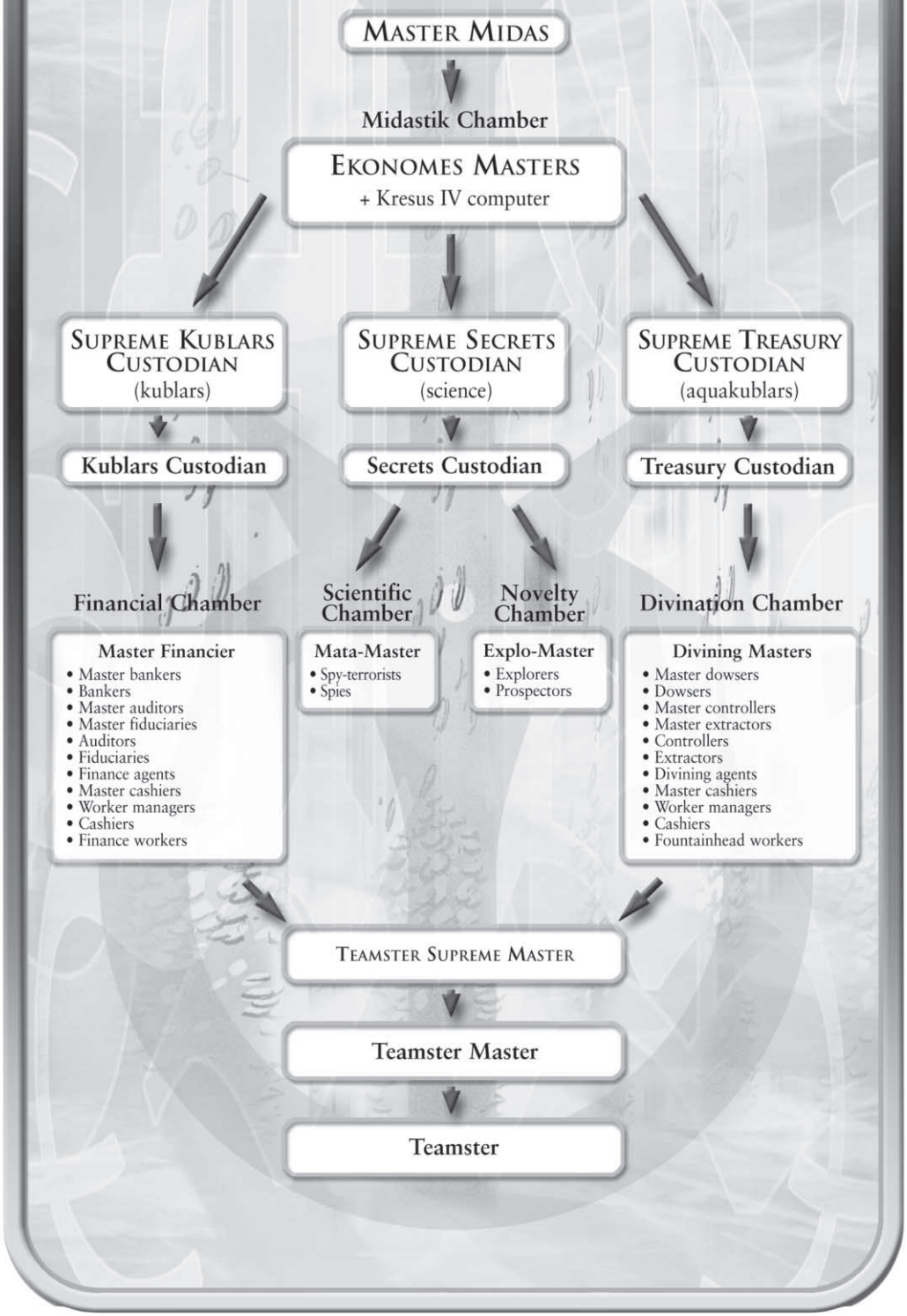
In charge of financial transactions and managing the balance of the universe's monetary flux, the Ekonomat equally enjoys an appreciable influence on technological and industrial evolution. Placed under the control of the Mata-Master, the Scientific Chamber's agents are capable of introducing themselves in any research-and-development factory and stealing industrial secrets from all factions and corporations. It is said that using their skills, they were able to approach the Sacrosanct Ophidat and successfully copy fragments of secrets that are inscribed on its scales. These matchless spies have become the pan-Techno Church's primary target since the accounting of a rumor establishing the existence of double agents, who are supposedly infiltrated within the heart of the pan-Techno Church.

Structure of the Ekonomat

Based on Neo-Knox, the former aquatic planet that became their headquarters, the Ekonomat also maintains a presence on all worlds of any financial importance. Neo-Knox is the only planet it officially owns, but all of its commercial delegations are granted diplomatic immunity. Besides which, every one of them is an impenetrable fort that nobody would risk taking by force, no matter how enticing the colossal riches that lie quietly in their vaults may be. Omni-present yet invisible, the Ekonomat adopts strategies determined by Neo-Knox, which are then scrupulously put into effect from the top down by all their components. Neo-Knox is where all arrangements are made, in the luxuriant calm of its

Ekonomat Organization Chart

The Ekonomat is an ultra-powerful group
that entirely controls all official financial transactions in the Empire.
They possess 100% of the banking system
and have absolute access to everyone's accounts and records.
They also control the distribution of drinking water
across the Human Universe.



palaces of unimaginable magnificence. One word, pronounced in a muffled tone by a distant voice, would suffice to plunge the economic balance of the universe into grave turbulence. Then, of course, investors across the universe would begin a chain of suicides, leading to a chain of deposits into the accounts of the Ekonomat.

Intellectual head and governing body of the Ekonomat, the "Midastic Chamber" is a board of twelve directors who rule the fate of the whole organization. The twelve Ekonomes Masters that make it up are all well-respected representatives of their community, each one assuming the presidency of the Chamber in turn. In all the history of the Ekonomat, never has the slightest harsh word been pronounced in the meeting room of the Midastic Chamber, which makes its decisions in the greatest unanimity that could possibly be conceived. The Ekonomes Masters use refined vocabulary and speak in smooth and mellifluous tones. The accord that reigns among the group can be explained by the fact that all twelve of them are devoted to the same worship of profit, and they always agree to maximize it. The incumbent president of the Midastic Chamber takes the title of Master Midas. His leadership role is essentially honorary, but he does have the task of settling any dispute that might by chance be raised. Aside from that, the Midastic Chamber's decisions are routinely confirmed by the analyses of the Kresus IV, a calculating machine whose power of long-term foresight is unprecedented. Its predictions concerning the development of the Bikramen exchange rate over the past two standard millennia have been accurate within a margin of error of 0.00000001%. Thus, the Ekonomes Masters congratulate themselves when their decisions corroborate Kresus IV's assessments.

The Ekonomat has three principal domains: banking, espionage, and water. Although superficially distinct, these three areas actually complement each other perfectly. In banking, the Ekonomat handles all of the classic transactions: investments, deposits, loans, collections, fund transfers, estate management, and so on. The field is placed under the leadership of the Supreme Kublars Custodian, who heads a diverse group of specialists in financial matters. The Ekonomat is considerate and understanding with their valued clients but mercilessly strict with their bad debtors. Their legal department's collectors are literally bloodthirsty and unmerciless killers.

As for the field of espionage — which falls under the authority of the Supreme Secrets Custodian — the Ekonomat works in two separate areas: the search for secrets known by others, and the attempt to discover secrets of the universe as yet unknown. Fieldwork in the first category, directed by the Mata-Master, resembles traditional espionage, except for the fact that no sense of ethics, morals, or dignity is allowed to interfere with the resourcefulness of their spies. All things are truly permitted. A spy-terrorist wouldn't give a moment's hesitation before sacrificing a planet in order to achieve his aims. The second category, on the other hand, involves more peaceful work. Under the leadership of the Explo-Master, explorers and prospectors set off in every direction throughout the cosmos, in search of secrets or new ideas that might represent some market value. The Ekonomat has not forgotten the good fortune that allowed them to discover Bemb and his miraculous formula for reducing water to its simplest form.

Lastly, the third area of the Ekonomat's activities is water. Their complete control over this element makes it their surest source of revenue. The method revealed to them by Bemb — based on secret principles that no one yet understands — is so powerful that the Ekonomat could instantly dry up an entire planet, converting it into a sterile desert incapable of sustaining life. Although such colossal power is tempting, Master Midas — the only one with the ability to tap into this mysterious process — has never used anything other than purely commercial means, the goals of which are ultimately altruistic. However, the possibility does exist, and if it ever felt the inclination to do so, the Ekonomat could easily take over the Empire by threatening to reduce every planet to a pile of arid dust. Under the authority of the Supreme Treasury Custodian, the water-related activities of the Ekonomat — which generate aquakublars — call upon the talents of an abundant pool of specialized workers.

In the final analysis, the Ekonomat's activities have only one goal in mind: to increase their capital. But such an increase does not come without its own risk. All that accumulated wealth naturally arouses envy, and there are numerous parties interested in relieving the Ekonomat of some of its wealth. To prevent that occurrence, and to discourage the ruthless, the Ekonomat has set up a force of discreet and efficient mercenaries, capable of bringing the fight to wherever its interests require.

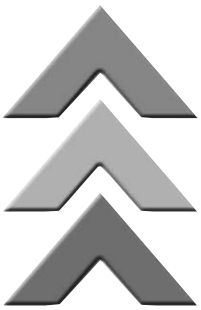
Armed Forces of the Ekonomat

Feared throughout the whole galaxy, the so-called Ekono-Mercenaries actually form part of a completely separate mercenary clan. Normally, a mercenary must train on War Star and duly register with the Central Mercenary Office before putting his services to use. In other words, the activities of all soldiers of fortune in the universe are in the hands of the Church of the Industrial Saints. Not so with the Ekono-Mercenaries. They are all free men, who choose to enlist. The taste for profit is the primary motivation for almost all of them, as no other military force in the universe can offer such generous wages. But the Ekonomat offers even more than that. They are all too familiar with the negative influences of money to put much trust in the loyalty of those who have it as their only motivation. So they offer something to these rootless soldiers even more valuable than fame and glory: a home, a community, and citizenship. The soldiers, after being kept under strict supervision during an enlistment contract that lasts one standard year, earn the right to join the population of Neo-Knox over the course of specially organized festivities. They are strongly encouraged to fraternize with young maidens who have been prepared to that purpose since birth. Those who yield to the girls' charms and consent to marriage not only see their career

prospects broaden considerably, but they are welcomed with open arms by the community. They always turn out to be the most loyal officers, utterly devoted to the protection of interests that are now their own.

This psychological gambit depends on a precise balance. It must not affect the warriors' military capacity nor produce complacency. Rather, it must give them a feeling of belonging, which is the only force capable of summoning heroism or allowing them to carry out any sacrifice. Because of this, and because of the incredible arsenal that their mercenary battalions have at their disposal, the Ekonomat wields a staggering amount of force. Its vessels, generously equipped with armament, patrol the immediate surroundings of Neo-Knox, as well as undertaking other protective missions, most of them involving the transportation of money. By avoiding a desire for conquest and by setting realistic objectives, the Ekonomat ensures that its armed forces remain ever vigilant and prepared for any eventuality. Any attempt to raid Neo-Knox — already with its natural protection of asteroid field and gaseous cloud — would be tantamount to committing suicide. Especially since the army of specialists led by the Supreme Custodian of the Treasure has clandestinely developed a whole range of horrifying weapons based on Bemb's formidable secret.

These weapons — made of hyperdesiccating beams — emit gigantic rays with spectacular and instantaneous effects. All water, down to the slightest molecule contained in either living tissue or dead matter is abruptly converted into oxygen and hydrogen atoms, which are then released into the atmosphere or into the vacuum of space. So far, the Ekonomat has never used this secret weapon, but their mercenary vessels are all equipped with it, and defensive batteries of the weapon have been installed on the numerous asteroids surrounding Planet Neo-Knox.



The Union of Colonial Planets

Beginnings

The Colonials, who descended from the Earth's wretched hordes cast out into the stars after the catastrophe on Terra Prima, have reached a far more enviable status today than ever before. But their path was a long, harsh, and rugged one, and more than once they had to fight tooth and nail for the victory that seemed to elude them. During their last days on Terra Prima, after the nobles had fled in their luxurious ships lined with silk and velvet, the starving convicts who were the remains of society had to squeeze into container-ships by the hundreds of millions, with scarcely more hope of survival in the atrocious conditions on board than on the scorched gray remains of their once-blue planet.

Three of these gargantuan stellar rafts — each one a makeshift construction of battered old space-transport barges, hastily jerry-rigged into an improbable mass immensely wide — departed Terra Prima for good, fleeing desperately towards uncertain adventure. They were the *October Mir,* the *Long March,* and the *Granma Barbuda.* After the crew yelled heart-rending good-byes on all frequencies available on their shipboard radios, each one set off in a different direction, knowing this would be the only way that even one of them might have the slimmest chance of survival. It took each ship more than twenty months to reach hyperlight speed. The propulsion drives suffered horrendous pressure and were on the point of exploding numerous times. Entire sections of the delicate, unstable constructions broke off and were engulfed in the vacuum of space, condemning millions of passengers to agonizing deaths.

Gradually, they began to get organized. Their first priority was the production of goods in the largest possible quantities. Teams were set up to work around the clock. Their production goals — in periods of five standard years — were all surpassed, but new and even more ambitious ones were immediately put in place. Productivity contests were staged between different teams. The most productive laborer would be held up as an example and glorified until his name became a household word. The reality of life in close quarters called for extremely strict community regulations, which everybody strove to obey as best they could, in the name of survival. In addition, the captains and shipboard officials — organized into committees that ruled the whole vessel — made the wise decision to form a police force that would be present in all areas of the vessel, keeping watch everywhere and ensuring that all directives were respected. They also encouraged informants. The most distant section of each vessel, which until that point had served as the hold, was pressurized for conversion into a prison for deviants. More precisely, it was a re-

The Ideal Society's Utopians

Within the heart of the Colonial Planets' gigantic family, there still remains some who are the pure embodiment of Trotsky-revolutionaries. Under the aegis of Kamar Kirin, these convinced Utopians in search of the ideal society courageously resist being mercilessly tracked down by the Empire. For decades they have been judged as both heretical and dangerous. Their profoundly human and moral values have been attracting the particular attention of Imperial spies and Endoguard squads, who have orders to eradicate this menace to the Empire's sovereignty.

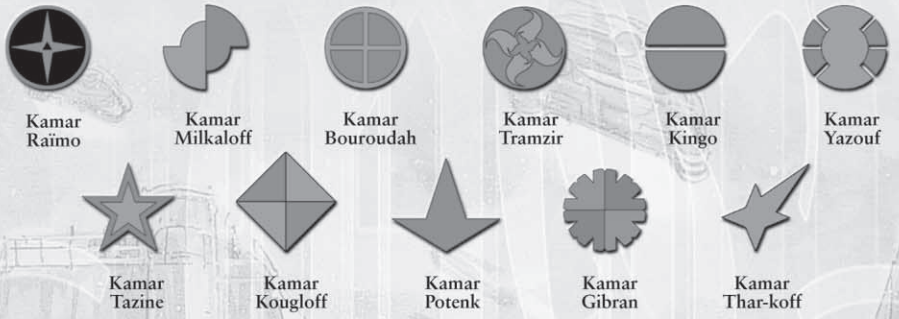
The Colonials

Principle Major Faction

Troglososialiks

President: Don Ruan Antonio de Rokha
Military Power: 60% of Colonial forces

Troglososialik Clans

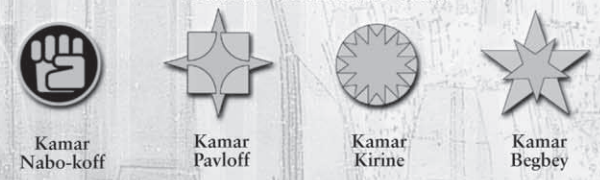


Major Faction

Galactic Mencheviks

President: Jerry-Michigan Poliaski
Military Power: 20% of Colonial forces

Galactic Menchevik Clans



Minor Factions

Various

Military Power: 20% of Colonial forces

Other Clans (Independant Kamars)

education camp, where those who had strayed from the correct path had a chance to make amends with hard work.

After more than a standard century in hyperspace, the three vessels made the decision to reenter the real universe. Four generations had passed, and survivors with memories of Terra Prima were few and far between. Over the course of months, the ships slowed to infra-light speed. Although they hadn't been in contact for decades, the *October Mir,* the *Long March,* and the *Granma Barbuda* returned to conventional space at the same moment. Against all statistical probability — or perhaps it should be interpreted as a manifestation of inherent social justice influenced by pressure from the masses — each of the three vessels emerged in a system containing a number of viable planets. Millions of light-years distant from each other, they decided to use the technique of "seed-spreading" they had chosen a hundred standard years ago. The plan involved landing a portion of their travelers, giving them the mission of colonizing the whole system before "spreading" to other systems. Meanwhile, the space vessel would continue its course, in search of other locations where new "seeds" could be planted. This way, in just over a millennium, an overwhelming number of systems and galaxies would have been colonized, and their goal would be accomplished. After the three original vessels had finished their quest through space, the "spreading" populations would continue to carry on their sacred quest.

But one day, the inevitable occurred. An Imperial detachment made contact with colonial vessels in a zone surrounding a colonized planet. There was no confrontation, merely a rapid assessment of the ratio of forces. The Colonials immediately realized they were no match for the newcomers, whose military technology was at least several millennia ahead of theirs, even at the most conservative estimate. First, they exchanged friendly signals, then messages of peace, then ambassadors, and finally, after an exile that had lasted for a few thousand years, the Colonials returned to the bosom of humankind. At that point, the Union of Planets was only a scattered mosaic of separate worlds, which had great difficulty maintaining an appearance of unity. However, despite the great distance between them and the communication difficulties that resulted from their outdated technology, the group of Colonial planets superficially agreed on certain key issues. Every Colonial planet endorsed the principle of "collective ownership of the means of production," and workers and peasants everywhere in the Union of Planets thanked their lucky stars for having been born on a world where the precepts of Paleo-Marx reigned supreme.

Of course, the Empire attempted to seduce these archeo-utopians with the charms of the modern world, but they had to face facts: the Colonials were fiercely proud of their singular beliefs. And if the influx of technological marvels somewhat softened the Colonials' strictness, it did not even slightly diminish the firmness of their convictions or their adhesion to dogma. So the Empire found other means. They appointed Colonial leaders to the governing associations of the Empire, and gave them an income in exchange for holding debates of an essentially folkloric nature. The Mentreks who had developed this solution gave it the colorful name of "poli-theatrics," because that's essentially what it was. On the Colonial planets, life hardly changed at all. But on the level of the Empire, Janus-Jana knows that in the future he can count on the loyalty of their populations, who occupy more than half of the major worlds in the universe.

The Colonials Today

Taking up 80% of the known habitable planets in the universe — both major and minor — and more than 60% of its human population, the Colonials bring real political weight to the Imperial arena. Nonetheless, in the upper political echelons of the Empire, even within the Senate, their pompous and exaggerated declarations are rarely taken seriously. But although they may be ridiculed in private, they are never openly challenged. The honor of the Colonials is extremely delicate, and they possess a military of considerable strength. True, the technology of their armaments is obsolete, but they can call upon infinite hordes of fanatic soldiers ready to die for their cause.

Aside from their impressive infantry — poorly equipped and almost untested, but infinite in number — the Colonials hold few strategic advantages. Ultimately, the power of any particular group is measured by the amount of force it can deploy. This was demonstrated by the Philodendra affair, in which the greed of the Church of the Industrial Saints turned a deaf ear both to pleas for mercy and to legal arguments confirming that the Empire had well and truly conceded unalienable planetary titles to the populations that inhabited them. If the Colonials had managed to summon any last-ditch resistance — such as a galactic trench war in the whole zone around Philodendra — perhaps they would have been able to repel the greed of the

The Universe's Orphans

When studying the history of the Colonial Planets, one realizes what a driving force migration and nomadism are in the evolution of these people who are attracted by the discovery of space and new habitable land. Today still, new colonies leave their native planets in the direction of the confines, aboard world-vessels loaded with provisions and survival systems. These new colonists are sometimes forgotten for several centuries, before they are accidentally discovered during an exploration mission. They may very well have been forever stranded on a hostile planet, victims of genetic mutations, living in symbiosis with an extra-terrestrial race of insectoids, or even dominated by a supernatural entity.

Techno-Technos without the Metabaron's help. But the disunity of the Union of Planets is their chronic weakness, which diminishes their power. Separated across time and space, the groups of colonists all developed along different lines. Additionally, because each one of the local authorities made it a point of honor to develop a personal variation of the original dogma, the Union of Planets became nothing but a vast assortment of clans divided into splinter groups. They may not be entirely antagonistic towards each other, but they are not always prepared to collaborate, either. The extended family of Colonials can be divided into two large branches — the major factions and the minor ones — which themselves contain an infinite number of various doctrines.

The Kamar Raïmo

The chiefs of the great Troglosocialik families' clans recognize as their leader a man chosen for his merit, courage, and warlike virtues. He is called the new Kamar Raïmo — a veritable incarnation of the Colonial Planets' community and tribal life. A living legend and a model for all clan members, the Kamar and all the clan members follow the Rayah honor code.

The isolated development over the course of millennia stranded in space of an extremely structured and hierarchical civilization that values the group above the individual led to results of both the best and worst kind. Indeed, while some clans managed to keep their ideals of justice and brotherhood intact, others became completely immersed in the darkest totalitarian fanaticism. Luckily, the most populated major faction — the Troglosocialiks — has kept itself free of any extreme dictatorial influence. The Troglosocialiks represent 60% of the Colonial population. The Techno-Technos consider them to be nostalgi-fanatics entrenched in the paleo-past, simply because they extol a way of life based on respect for living things and harmony with nature. That was the message preached by Don Nicanor Rosamel de Rokha, father of Doña Vicenta (wife of Steelhead the Metabaron), and uncle of Don Juan Antonio de Rokha, current President of the Troglosocialik clan. Their hatred of the Techno-Technos is fierce, and the Techno-Technos return it in kind. The Troglosocialik clan incorporates a large number of minor clans, one of which is the clan of the Kamar Raimo. A man of astounding bravery, with long-standing loyalty to the Empire, the Kamar Raimo could well be the next president of the Union of Planets.

Second largest of the major factions, the Galactic Menscheviks are self-acknowledged misanthropic loners who want only one thing: to live peacefully, far removed from the Empire's fast-paced lifestyle. Opinionated, secretive, and hard-working, they are found in the most inhospitable zones, even to the frozen ends of the universe. To cite but one example, the clan of the Kamar Nabo-Koff settled on a solar ice floe and are not known for the warmth of their welcome. They are excellent explorers, highly familiar with these rarely visited regions. Currently ruled by Jerry-Michigan Poliaski, the Galactic Menscheviks represent 20% of the Colonial population.

The remaining 20% of the Colonial population is made up of a variety of movements and minor factions — the Ultra-Colonialists, the Super-Conquerors, the Troglo-Barbarians, the Poly-Schismatics, the Amico-Visitors, the Hyper-Putschists, the Trotsko-Revolutionary Avatars, and the Proto-Nihiliks — who range from eccentric to extreme, with dangerous clans at both ends. Some of them have kept their hate and rage alive and endlessly foment attacks against the Empire.

The Maganats

Based on a social system modeled on the Ancient Regime, the Nobility devotes itself primarily to maintaining its privileges. The members of the High Nobility (the Archi-Nobility and a few families of the Nobility) make up their own court in the Emperoress's entourage on the Golden Planet, but they also possess fiefdoms as wide as galaxies. Their life is therefore divided between traditional courtly activities at the Golden Palace, and activities typical of galactic country squires. Even on their domains, there is a wide range of different lifestyles, each with an infinite number of variations. Some of the planets are almost untouched worlds where flora and fauna are kept in abundance for the pleasures of hunting in its oldest form, but others are highly sophisticated urban worlds with the latest technological systems and devices available anywhere.

Whatever his rank, vanity is the most distinguishing feature of a Noble. His life is nothing but a long uninterrupted flurry of festivities, and his goal in life is the frenzied quest for pleasure in all its forms. All social norms, taboos, rules, and morals that used to prevail have long since been shattered to bits. The only thing that remains is the thirst for profit, a yearning for power, submission to the strong, contempt for the weak, pettiness, insipidness of mind and spirit, and a taste for the easy life. As a group, the Nobility gives the impression of a collection of depraved buffoons concerned mainly with vainglory, finery, and trinkets, who enjoy the right of life or death over the subjects in their fiefdoms, and who tremble at the idea that they might lose their privileges and rights at the slightest sign of displeasure from their Emperoress.

Nonetheless, the Pillar of the Nobility is one of the key elements that holds the Empire together. Because they draw all their privileges from the Emperoress, the Nobles are always ready to defend Him-Her to the death. To put it another way, Janus-Jana's interests are their own, so His-Her glory is tied to theirs. Of course, that does not eliminate the power of greed, and it's obvious that if the opportunity arose, not one of them would hesitate to betray the Sacred Androgyne in order to attain power for them-

selves. Many of them even conspire to that very end. The Mentreks dispersed throughout the universe in the service of the Great Houses are constantly hatching outlandish stratagems to bring their masters closer to power. But the Emperoress and the Nobility are effectively united by virtue of mutual benefit from a corrupt social system, and both of them want the situation to go on as it is. It is for that reason that Janus-Jana regularly convenes the High Council of the Nobility, where all He-She has to do is listen to their trivial proposals and hand out awards, ribbons, and baubles in "gratitude."

The Initiation of Young Cadets

More importantly, in their own eyes, the Nobility represents pomp and circumstance, overstated splendor and major events where they can put on display their immense wealth and shocking bad taste, see and be seen, observe others, make comments, size people up, be judgmental, exchange ridicule, and participate in all the other important aspects of life. What follows is an unabridged transcription of a moment in the life of the Golden Planet's high dignitaries, which illustrates just how burdensome the daily life of a Noble can be, even though they may be envied by the vast majority of people.

On that day, as on every other day at that time, a radiant sun showered its rays upon De Viris, the small artificial satellite of the Golden Planet, dappling it here and there with small coppery patches. Subtle yet lively glimmers of light gave an inspiring Impressionistic view of the immense purple lawns punctuated by turquoise islands and abundant clusters of flowers. The scene was all the more inspiring due to the magnificent costumes of the elegant Noble ladies, outdoing each other in eccentric fantasy and endlessly inventing new color palettes. Everywhere, batches of color blended to make flamboyant swirls, leaving a permanent imprint on the retina.

One retina present on the scene was Armistau Meedpin's cybernetic eye, which he played over the environment, taking in the sight of all the Noble Houses participating in one of the most spectacular events outside the Golden Planet, instantly broadcasting it to thousands of spectators via the People for Nobody channel on the hypertele. His eye lingered for a few moments on General Tarkin's face, still slightly strained from his difficulties on Planet Agola but imbued with the inflexible sense of authority that made him the envy of so many.

The knot of people around the renowned military man suddenly parted to reveal a swell of high fashion. The Mono-Duchess of Vronokoff, related on her mother's side to the House of Poly-Romanoffs — surrounded as always by her retinue of young heirs whose haughty features were permanently frozen in masks of deep disdain — tapped the General's majestic medal-covered chest with the tip of her fan. "They tell me," she said in a light tone gently laced with malice, "that you had taken an interest in Agolan poetry... how delightful. But see that your new passion does not dull your talent for strategy.…"

And without further comment, she resumed her path, at once distant and superb. Attendants twittered in her wake like birds snatching up grains. Crimson-faced and choking for breath, General Tarkin seethed with controlled rage. The whole universe, live and direct, had witnessed his setback. He was awash in shame. He swore to himself that tonight some innocent creatures would be humiliated and tortured.

Servant-robots bustled everywhere, their mechanical arms loaded with platters of small delicacies from Aldebaran and elegant flutes of champa-whisky. Here and there, vast tables covered with white linens offered an assortment of all types of fruits and drinks to the Nobles. The banners of all the Great Houses fluttered atop tall poles in a light breeze. Immense trees clipped into perfectly round shapes gently waved their musical fronds. Everything about the synthetic scene, including the song of a few strategically placed artificial birds, contributed in bringing an air of total harmony to the day.

The only downside of the graduation trials of the Endoguard cadets was that they took place only once a year. Two hundred forty-four long standard days would go by before they happened again. That's why it was so vital for the day to be a success.

The children who had been with the Endoguard since their infancy had a thin shaft of irradiated Netranekkon inserted into their medullas before the end of their eleventh year, once their brains had developed sufficiently. This device, called a Gargat, made them into powerful killing machines blindly obedient to the will of their superiors, and therefore to the will of the Emperoress. But before this initiatory surgery took place, while they were still in possession of their naive faculty of initiative, they were subjected to trials designed to measure their qualities of determination, brutality, and savagery. And those who distinguished themselves on this occasion

were bequeathed the envied title of "First Cadets." The honor subsequently showered upon their families was great indeed.

As a long trumpet call announced the beginning of the trials, and scattered groups began to converge on the massive doorways of the huge circular-shaped building, the corner of Amistau Meedpin's eye discerned the slim silhouettes of Luxuria von Stupre and Voluptia della Fregnata, two archetypes of depravity wearing the most indiscreet clothing conceivable. With informal politeness bordering on vulgarity, they accosted the still frozen General Tarkin and made it their mission to comfort him. As Luxuria nibbled on one of his ears, Voluptia breathed into the other, "Come pay us a visit, Tarkin darling, we'll help you forget those mean little creatures. And you won't find us hard to catch at all…"

More than a hundred thousand spectators had taken their seats within the stands of the gigantic enclosure, whose dimensions measured halfway between a paleo-stadium on Terra Prima and the combat hold of the Circus Maximus.. Anybody who was anybody at the Golden Palace was here, as well as a few who weren't. People fought for seats, and some of them would have gone as far as selling their titles, fiefdoms, friends or families in order to get a seat more in the public eye. Of course, proximity to the richly decorated boxes of the Great Houses of Nobility was especially desirable, as if a little bit of their disdainful splendor would dust the shoulders of the humbler spectators with glory. The Emperoress was not present, but a life-size holographic representation of the Sacred Egg floated inside the Imperial box.

In the first trial, the thousand most naturally savage and warlike children from the Endoguard Training School competed against the clock to skewer the greatest possible number of creatures imported from a distant and isolated planet. The little creatures had big round fearful eyes, alarming shyness, peaceful natures, and incredibly immaculate white coats. With 267 kills, a young nephew-in-law of a distant cousin of the Mono-Duchess of Vronokoff had distinguished himself well, and the box in which the respected Noblewoman sat among her entourage like a precious diamond in a setting of dazzling gems was a showcase for a degree of false modesty that will probably never be seen again.

Servant-robots progressed up and down the aisles to give the spectators time to recover from the heightened emotion. The Nobles fanned themselves elegantly and made a thousand gestures to proclaim their disinterest, detachment, and unconcerned nonchalance. Diavaloo's voice, commentating the event, drifted through the air without interrupting their private conversations about such topics as how exquisite the weather was. Everyone tried to fit in by affecting an air of gloomy boredom. At a certain point, a remark from the hypertele announcer suddenly caught the crowd's attention: "…At least our young cadets know how to deal with small creatures…" This remark seemed to give rise to great laughter. Some laughed gracefully and elegantly, while others guffawed without the slightest sign of restraint. In any case, a great wave of mirth continued to ripple through the public, like a storm refusing to abate.

In the officials' grandstand, General Tarkin had gone from his waxen pallor to an alarming shade of marble. His unmoving eyes were fixed upon an invisible point right in front of him, light-years distant. The numerous Imperial representatives by his side undertook calculated shifting movements designed to distance themselves from him, with varying degrees of discretion. But the show was already starting again, and everyone began to prepare for the grand finale.

The 500 remaining contestants who had obtained the highest scores in the first challenge now had to face a trial that was as spectacular as it was simple. The five hundred candidates would gather in a starting line, then race across the length of the arena, a distance of about 300 meters. The first 50 to arrive would qualify for the next trial. To make things more interesting, approximately 10,000 creatures with delicate appearances but extremely aggressive temperaments were let into the ring. The young boys would race naked and weaponless, but all blows would be permitted. The battle was fierce right from the outset, with vicious combat everywhere. In barely ten minutes, the sand was stained with countless pools of green liquid spilled from the wounds of the ferocious aliens, but there were also a few spots where red blood could be seen. The winner, the Mono-Duchess of Vronokoff's young relative, finished the race in exactly 27 standard minutes and 32 standard seconds. The death of 76 young cadets would be mourned. It goes without saying that not one of the alien creatures survived.

Then, after another short delay, it was time for the final challenge, which would determine the "First Cadet of the Year." This title would arrange the Noble houses in a hierarchy of honor whose subtle effects would be felt in the Golden Palace for a long time to come. This trial would also be a race. Starting at one wall of the arena, the 50 candidates would rush headlong towards 49 doors that opened into a bizarre construction. This tangled and perverse mazelike concentric structure would swallow all aspirants to the supreme title, bringing them face to face with a diabolical arrangement of zigzags, narrow halls and other traps, leading the group onwards to an ever diminishing number of doors. The first one to pass through the final doorway would become First Cadet of the Year. Once again, the boys would race naked, and of course, all blows would be permitted.

The public was not disappointed. There were many opportunities to whoop and holler, and as always the level of preparation provided by the Endoguard Training School was to be praised. Not one of the candidates showed the slightest sign of weakness. None of them made the slightest noise when struck. And not one of the seventeen caught in a deadly trap emitted a scream. Once again, the Endoguard inspired pride and reassurance that the Empire was under its protection.

The Mono-Duchess of Vronokoff, whose young relative had been awarded the coveted First Cadet title, ex-

pended considerable effort in not seeming to attach the slightest importance to the event. The general mood was one of light frivolity, although some let it descend further, into outright indecency. The finale, a last-minute dash that left things uncertain till the last second, had really been spectacular. Indeed, were it not for the young winner's survival reflex, a last-ditch kick that knocked an ambitious contender over a 60-foot drop, the outcome might have been entirely different.

Amid the sounds of chatter, laughter, and a smooth silken rustle, the crowd pushed against each other to exit the building and seek further refreshment at the sumptuous function rooms on De Viris. Suddenly, Diavaloo's strident yet playful voice stopped them in their tracks. "Quiet! I asked for quiet, my beloved but overtalkative friends! I've just received a message from the Emperoress, I kiss the ground touched by His-Her gaze, in which Janus-Jana conveys His-Her displeasure." Diavaloo paused briefly for effect, to let his words bore their way into the fearful souls of all present. A peculiar silence fell over the assembly, with tension brewing in the undercurrent. "Yes, you heard me right, dear spectators, I said displeasure… For on this day that we pay tribute to the unflinching courage of the Endoguard soldiers, the honor of one among them is tarnished. It may be true that General Tarkin's only sin was an excess of confidence, but the Emperoress cannot allow it to pass that the Empire is made vulnerable to ridicule." The silence became even more pronounced. An attentive ear could have easily discerned the soft trickle of sweat down the spines of the audience.

"As a result," Diavaloo continued, "General Tarkin is invited to satisfy the Emperoress's wishes by committing suicide immediately, in the middle of the arena… But beforehand, he will be allowed to nominate five individuals to be put to death, for having dangerously undermined the Endoguard. With this wise and lucid decision, Janus-Jana hopes that His-Her message of love will be clear to all His-Her subjects."

As Diavaloo prattled on, some color returned to the General's pale face, and the Endoguard officer now wore the cruel smile of a paleo-wolf, which until recently had made him feared across hundreds of galaxies. Everywhere he glanced, a ripple of panic stirred the crowd….

General Tarkin quickly scanned the horizon, his eyes coming to rest on the Mono-Duchess of Vronokoff. She met his gaze and even seemed to defy it. For a moment, a glimmer of a smile played at the corner of his mouth, but it quickly turned into a scowl of frustration. Not only was she protected by her status, but more importantly, she was the queen of the day. So he would have to depart without the satisfaction of revenge. As for Luxuria von Stupre and Voluptia della Fregnata, they were invisible to him…. Well, he had to make up his mind. Lastly, glancing behind him, he spied the band of military advisors whom he had always loathed with the deepest cordiality. "Well, I suppose…" he mused.

Later, much later, once the members of the Great Houses had returned to the Golden Planet or their faraway fiefdoms, after the cliques of Nobles had resumed their lives of intrigue and hedonism, the Mono-Duchess of Vronokoff was heard to refer to that year's Endoguard Young Cadet Trial in tones of warmth and sincerity that were completely alien to her: "Absolutely the best trials ever. By far…"

The Structure

On the scale of the universe, the Nobility has little influence over political affairs. Although it may be a Pillar of the Empire, the Imperial House displays no interest in its concerns, its claims, or its fickle mood swings. Janus-Jana is the absolute monarch and decides the fate of the Human Universe alone. On the local scale, however, the Noble Houses are representatives of the Imperial House and can claim certain privileges. In the first place, since they carry out a variety of tasks for the Empire, they require the resources to do so. In order to patrol outer space and maintain Imperial order, they need armies, vessels, and weapons. All Noble Houses who hold a fiefdom have the right to raise and equip an armed force. As a precautionary measure, the Empire sets limits on the level of firepower and technology they can attain, but some Houses possess formidable troops nonetheless. Aside from military might, each House wields whatever political sway it likes over its territories, and therefore can set up any infrastructure they wish in the areas of finance, policing, and administration.

Like the ancient nobility on Terra Prima, of which it is a distant descendant, the Empire's Nobility is strictly regimented and hierarchical. In order of descending importance, the titles generally are: King, Supra-Prince, Mono-Duke, Bis-Marquis, Tri-Viscount, Hypo-Count, Non-Baron, and Petro-Knight. (Some families use whimsical variants of these titles, such as "tsar" for "king," to ensure a desired estimation of their House.)

According to tradition, the titles are passed to the males in order of birth,

The Feudah Dynasty

Generally characterized by their luxurious residences and their planet's excessive splendor, certain Maganats equally distinguish themselves with an eccentricity that at times borders on insanity. For more than 30 generations, the Feudah Dynasty lived as if in the medieval era, modeling their traditions on those of the paleo-knights of ancient times. Their stone castles stand on Tanelorn, a minor renamed planet from the confines, whose forests are filled with mutant game. They are well known for their schools of archery and paleo-swords. His highness King Arthur Feudah, the thirty-fifth overlord having this name, religiously carries out the knighting of young adults in his clan, while Merlin VII perpetuates a long tradition of visionary astrologers.

after the eldest son, of course, has been sent to the Endoguard. (There are rare and bizarre expections: Some families allow females to inherit, while some allow the title to pass by the female line even if the females may not inherit.)

Census-taking of all the Noble lines spread throughout the universe is a colossal task that requires a staggering amount of calculating power, especially as the Empire distributes new titles and fiefdoms as quickly as new planets and systems are discovered and brought into the Imperial domain. Ascent in the Noble hierarchy is not an easy thing, and the rare families that manage to do it generally owe it to several centuries of patient intrigue. The very oldest of the Houses, those that signed, more than 25,000 years ago, a personal pact of vassalage to Rosemonde I the Rebis, received at that time a medallion containing a drop of the holy Golden Oil. Since then, that ceremony has more or less fallen out of favor, but from time to time the Empire will bring out another drop, to reward a Noble House or buy its favor.

Alongside the hierarchy of titles, there is another classification system within the Nobility, which includes four levels, in order of importance: the Omni-Nobility, the Archi-Nobility, the Nobility, and the Infra-Nobility. The Infra-Nobility is the lowest, but assignment to a particular level of Nobility is not linked to title alone: throughout the universe, hundreds of kings and supra-princes could easily be found within the Infra-Nobility. No, what determines the families and houses of the Infra-Nobility is their lack of financial means. They are most likely to be the Noble Houses that settled on outlying planets or planets lacking in natural resources. Inevitably, their lives are somewhat rustic. Very often, their scanty funds do not prevent them from displaying a haughty arrogance, and most often it is the Infra-Noble families who are the most punctilious on matters of etiquette. Their greatest and most desparate hope is to someday join the Aristos of an Endocity.

The next level is the regular Nobility, which is by far the largest group. Almost the entire spectrum can be found within it, because the power and influence of some of the families of the regular Nobility can almost rival the Empire, while others eke out more or less pathetic lives on worlds whose luster has somewhat faded.

The Archi-Nobility, on the other hand, only contains seven families. Of course, each one encompasses an infinite amount of subdivisions, but fundamentally only those seven clans can claim status in the Archi-Nobility.

Then, at the very top is the Omni-Nobility, which includes one and only one lineage, that of the Trans-Bourbons. At the present time, the Omni-Nobility only has one member, the Emperoress Janus-Jana, although technically that one member counts as two.

The seven families of the Archi-Nobility have the mannerisms that might be expected of archetypes representing a very distinctive clan. An informed observer could even take great pleasure in watching them play their roles perfectly, down to every detail. One example of note is the Retro-Windsor family. That opulent House is ruled by Her Majesty Queen Lizabeth of Windsor, a ravishing woman of now mature age and presumably celibate, since she is married. Indeed, her Supra-Prince Consort is invisible and insignificant. He is neither seen nor talked about. On the other hand, there are many remarks that people make about her: that she drinks, that her impassive face hides many shameful deeds, that she revels in debauchery, that her IQ is less than two digits, and other comments of an unfriendly nature. What is known for certain is that she collects hats. The House itself is stupendously wealthy and presides over Planet Laylin, a magnificent world in the Windsor system. Her private guard consists of three regiments (Welch, Rish, and Kottish guards) whose richly embroidered uniforms are slightly absurd, but whose formidable fighting divisions are feared in most parts of the universe. Thanks to its many contacts in the world of finance, the House of Windsor makes its profit by manipulating its colossal capital base, inherited from a not-so-distant era, when it conquered entire systems on behalf of the Empire. It must be emphasized that 80% of the members of the House live on the Golden Planet, most of them women, where they embody daily the true meaning of the word "courtesan." These beautiful pale-skinned women seem to have but one ambition, which most of them attain: to secure the most lucrative relationship possible.

The other great families of the Archi-Nobility are the Kama-Ming

The Artistos

If the Infra-Nobility remains the most modest and least powerful on the Maganat scale of merit, its members do have the possibility of attaining Aristos status by renouncing their lineage and rights in order to join this new cast. In return, they are granted the privileges of Endocity Nobles. However, the new Aristos are confined to their new fief and lose all rights and influence beyond the Prez's jurisdiction.

Hierarchy of Noble Titles

The hierarchy of common family titles for the nobility is as follows:

- *King*
- *Supra-Prince*
- *Mono-Duke*
- *Bis-Marquis*
- *Tri-Viscount*
- *Hypo-Count*
- *Non-Baron*
- *Petro-Knight*

Note that individual families may chose variations on these titles that are peculiar to their heritage.

(led by Holy Father of the People Tsui-Amah of Kama-Ming), the Poly-Romanoffs, the Crypto-Medicis, the Hyper-Hapsburgs, the Ante-Kennedys and the Omni-Shakyas.. All members of these families live on the most beautiful planets of their Maganats, in sumptuous palaces of indescribable splendor and luxury.

Hierarchy of the Maganats

Each Noble familiy possesses a particular rank. There are four ranks of Nobility:

- The Omni-Nobility, reserved for Trans-Bourbons
- The Archi-Nobility, composed of seven families of the upper Nobility
- The Nobility, groups the majority of Noble families
- The Infra-Nobility, designates the "poor" families

Differences between the nobility are well known to everyone, especially the Nobles themselves. Yet, no one would risk ridiculizing themselves by stating the obvious in a social gathering. A simple smirk or giggle is often enough to put a lower family in its proper place.

The Omni-Nobility is the official title of the current leaders of the Empire, the direct bloodline of Rosemonde I the Rebis. The unique representative of the most noble of families is the Emperoress.

The Archi-Nobility

The Ante-Kenedi

His Majesty the King Kurt Jackson of Ante-Kenedi

The Kinglet William Jackson of Ante-Kenedi

- Principle Source of Income: Misappropriation of funds.
- Patrimony: Two systems, including a major world, Kenedior, and the planet Amerine, where they have established their capital-palace. The Ante-Kenedis chiefly reside on Golden Planet, where they keep themselves busy with the Empire's politics.
- Particularities: At court, nothing escapes them, and many noble families come to "consult" the Ante-Kenedi senators to get advice or favors.
- Quote: "Politics should remain a privilege, in everyone's interest." — Senator Archi-Balde II of Ante-Kenedi.

The Crypto-Medicis

His Majesty King Ruis Federico Bolino of Crypto-Medicis

The Supra-Princess Katarine Bolini of Crypto-Medicis

- Principle Source of Income: Patronage of the fine arts.
- Patrimony: Three major world systems, one of which is a complete replica of Terra Prima. This planet is available for rentals of all kinds, including destruction, such as experiments with new weapons or simply for the pure pleasure of destruction. For the modest sum of a few million kublars, a "destruction of Terra Prima" certificate is offered.
- Particularities: The Crypto-Medicis' sumptuous chateau is found on planet Corada in the Medicor system. The largest gallery of art in the Human Universe is housed there — artists pay fortunes to have their works exposed in the Crypto-Medicis personal collection, which equally finances the largest galactic company of archeo-paleological research.
- Quote: "When art rhymes with kublar, it's poetry…" —Neo-cosme the Elder.

The Hyper-Ab'sbourg

His Majesty the Supreme Kaïser Hans Grüber von Hyper-Ab'sbourg

The Supra-Prince Otto von Hyper-Ab'sbourg

- Principle Source of Income: Pillage.
- Patrimony: In addition to owning 15 or so systems of which two are major worlds, the Hyper-Ab'sbourgs possess an impressive number of land parcels on thousands of other planets. This real estate treasure chest results from their insatiable need to conquer new territory.
- Particularities: The Hyper-Ab'sbourg family is organized into a formidable army, possessing the most impressive and best organized military force of all the Maganats. Their citadel-fortress is situated on Karpol III, in the Ab'or system.
- Quote: "Total war? Dreams of old…" —Kaïser Magnus von Hyper-Ab'sbourg.

The Kama Ming

His Majesty the Saint Father of the Tsui-Amah people of Kama Ming

Laonin, Supra-Prince Illuminati of Kama-Ming

- Principle Source of Income: Mass production.
- Patrimony: Twelve systems, including five major worlds. All worlds are organized into human "termites nests," dedicated entirely to the mass mining of precious minerals, gems, and rare raw materials, with the exception of planet Badmech in the Mingor system, where the royal family resides in a splendid jade termitarium.

Planet Safari

The hypertele program "Within Your Reach" recently experienced a dazzling viewer increase through the promotion of a one-of-a-kind contest. Followed by billions of lower-level inhabitants, each month the show offers to a dozen happy winners the right to leave their Endocity on a luxurious spatio-ketch, to discover Planet Safari's tropical savannas. After an unforgettable week of banquets and swimming in the waters of artificial lakes, sponsored by the Hyper-Ab'sbourg, the winner-guests are let loose into nature, for a thrilling hunting experience. No winner has ever returned to share his photos and souvenirs, but the hypertele audience numbers haven't stopped climbing.

• Particularity: The Kama-Ming are the least inclined to involve themselves in Imperial plots and absolutely do not tolerate any intrusion into their own affairs.

• Quote: "One for all; all for Ming!" —The Supreme Mandarin.

The Poly-Romanoff

His Majesty the Tsar Horlog of Poly-Romanoff
The Supra-Prince Mamouch Yvan Horlog of Poly-Romanoff

• Principle Source of Income: Arms and weapons sales.

• Patrimony: With 21 systems in their possession of which eleven are major worlds, the Poly-Romanoffs are by far the richest of all the Maganats. Eight of these major worlds are exclusively reserved for the royal family and serve as hunting reserves, paradise-planets, and dependencies of Neo-Moskou, the Romanor system's mother-planet.

• Particularities: Parties given by the Poly-Romanoff family are known throughout the endo-fringe for their splendor and unforgettable orgiastic debauchery. Incidentally this family completely and exclusively equips the Imperial Endoguard. All weapons and armor are manufactured in the thousands of giga- arms factories owned and run by the Poly-Romanoffs.

• Quote: "What's tiresome about the people is that they still have to exist." —Mono-Duke Igor Poliakine of Poly-Romanoff.

The Retro-Winds'Or

Her Majesty Queen Louisabeth of Winds'Or
The Supra-Princess Anna-Bella of Winds'Or

• Principle Source of Income: Investments.

• Patrimony: Laylin, a sole but magnificent planet, located in the Winds'Or system, where the queen lives. Even so, 80% of the family lives on Golden Planet.

• Particularities: Women from the family line are courtesans who obtain favors from their suitors without any difficulties…

Quote: "A good marriage is an Archi-marriage!" —The Bis-Marquise Rosa-Rosam.

The Omni-Shakya

His Majesty the Bodhi-Pad Aradjasatrü of Omni-Shakya
The Supra-Prince Masamsatrü of Omni-Shakya

• Principle Source of Income: Narcotics.

• Patrimony: Ten systems. Almost all of their wealth comes from the traffic — legal or illegal — of drugs and narcotic substances of all kinds. The unbelievable wealth they have accumulated over the years has been turned into lavish palaces, filled with magnificent jewels and gemstones, among which are the most rare in the entire Human Universe. Their principal palace is found on the planet Sacred Lotus, in the Mahal system.

• Particularities: Their knowledge of new and exotic drugs cannot be equaled. They prefer to take refuge in their smoke-filled universe, rather than lower themselves by frequenting other Noble families. They consider it degrading to live in the same "reality" as their fellow creatures. Their connections with smugglers and pirates are both numerous and prolific.

• Quote: "As law has its place, the way will take you there…." —The Great Pachen Adrah-limpür of Omni-Shakya

The Factions

The Mentreks

Although the Mentreks are present throughout the whole Empire, little is known about these mysterious beings. Humans respect them for their tremendous store of knowledge but are unsettled by their bizarre powers, both real and imaginary. Hence the sight of their emaciated figures topped by blinking brains always inspires a mixture of respect and fear in common mortals. Indeed, the Mentrek clan would be completely ostracized from the Empire's other populations were it not for their staggering mental abilities. Each one of them is able to calculate pi to 2,758 decimal places and quote the stellar coordinates of all worlds ever visited by the Imperial fleet. But that is not the limit of their abilities, and it would be a mistake to think of them simply as living adding machines endowed with infinite memory. Each Mentrek is a sublime combination of data and intuition, a blend of astonishing technological prowess and lightning-quick deduction. They are fragile, like all precision equipment, but once they are able to balance hard data with the flow of thought, their expert prognostications take them to the threshold of new truths, which the human spirit could never hope to attain on its own.

The Origins of Mentrek Intelligence

Mentrek intelligence has its origins in the pioneer days of long ago, when the Milky Way was first being explored. In that era of sublightspeed travel, the exploration of space was a long and drawn-out affair. Even a small jump to a destination only two light-years away might last 25 standard months. Although the brave pioneers could dodge the clutches of time by plunging into the frozen sleep of cryochambers to slow their biological rhythms, each expedition had its share of long days of inactivity. To combat boredom, the primarily scientific and technical crew would devote themselves to chess. After a thousand years of space exploration, rich complexity was added to this immortal game by giving it a three-dimensional scope: the pieces could move not only horizontally but also vertically. Instantly, millions and millions of possibilities were added. Games between even the fiercest players might last for years. For centuries, the idea of reaching checkmate was only a pure theoretical fantasy. An obsession with the game took over the minds of the players and some of them were driven insane. With the exponential increase of combinations, this seemingly harmless pursuit became the abyss that swallowed the souls of Terra Prima's most brilliant engineers.

The answer was found in technology. While the intellect might stray into infinite conjecture, cold superconducting teflo-silicon chips could provide a solid statistical base for three-dimensional positions of pieces on the board. Little by little, the crew began to make use of ever more miniaturized personal computation units. But analysis didn't resolve everything. As efficient as it was, artificial intelligence would never match the insightful flashes of genius of the human mind. And little by little, the idea of uniting the two forces emerged.

The first attempt at a merge was not really successful. In the beginning, the main obstacle was getting data to flow to the appropriate sector. So an initial analytical filter was installed prior to the cerebral command path stage. Then, by trial and error over the course of centuries, the driving force behind the architecture of the Mentrek brain was developed: a fully incorporated multi-cognitive analysis tree. The concept behind this rather old-fashioned phrase was both brilliant and simple: the technological device had to emulate the circuits of human deductive reasoning. The hardware's solidity and the wetware's fluidity were united to make a perfectly homogenous whole. This sent the restricted binary system back into the darkness of paleo-history and paved the way for analysis that would not suffer the uncertainty of determining probability paths. The second attempt was more successful, and once the problem of tissue rejection was overcome, a new generation surfaced that merged deduction with data.

Mentrek Training

Inevitably, the introduction into the Empire of beings with such great capacity provoked a huge uproar. Such quantities of intelligence for the sake of a seemingly harmless game introduced the seeds of promise both exhilarating and disturbing at once. Their analytical powers might become powerful weapons in the wrong hands. The Empire could not allow this to occur. As soon as it became clear that Mentrek intelligence was a key to power, the Empire took this new area of human activity beneath its control and predictably entrusted its technological arm, the Church of the Industrial Saints, with its supervision. Since then, the Techno-Technos have held exclusive authority not only over the identification and training of any individuals who show intellectual talent, but also over manufacture, installation, and maintenance of the multicognitive analytical brains.

Everywhere that the Empire is represented, down to the smallest planet, Techno-scouts are constantly on the lookout for even the youngest child whose intellectual capacity appears greater than the norm. The harsh reality is that the creation of a Mentrek brain is not entirely without risks. Unless a very specific combination of neurocortical qualities is present, the recipient may well be plunged instantly into the depths of madness. Or worse, the cerebral hemispheres of his brain might swell out of proportion and explode. However, any young individuals who are gifted enough at the age of six months to identify visual symbols and arrange them in a logical fashion, thereby demonstrating both graphic and semantic skills, receive intensive preparation followed by the implantation of a cybernetic brain. Once that's done, their intelligence unfurls like a golden paleo-blossom offering

itself to the morning sun. The instant a gifted child is recognized, Techno-Techno envoys administer a Meta-Cerebro test. If the child survives the test, he is taken from his family and sent to the Mentrek Training Base on the Central Planet.

The first phase of training for all apprentice Mentreks has only one goal: to increase the volume of the brain by a factor of ten. The transplant's success will in large part be determined by the space available in the cranial cavity. So, during infancy and childhood, before their bone structure has entirely hardened, the Mentreks-to-be are subjected to a massive dual program. A chemical substance is administered intravenously to soften the spongy tissues and make the skull bones flexible, while at the same time they are force-fed incomprehensible amounts of information during extended days of study to encourage growth of neurons and synapses. By the time they reach the age of thirteen, when they are preparing for their new brain implantation, the skulls of the apprentice Mentreks are often three times as thick as their torsos. Of course, not all the children are able to withstand the intense regimen of cerebral augmentation, and with each advance to the next grade, the drop-out rate seems to average about 20%. Once the program is complete, another test is administered. This time, the criteria are specifically physical, to determine whether or not the shape of the skull will actually allow the transplant. Indeed, despite the conjoined efforts of armies of Techno-Technos during the program, the bone structures of certain subjects remain totally inflexible. These subjects, unfit for maximum utility, are eliminated. The others, whose heads have attained the desired dimensions, have arrived at the time of the sacred implantation.

Currently, under Janus-Jana's reign, the manufacture of Mentrek brains is under the exclusive domain of the Church of the Industrial Saints. Thus, only the human and robo-surgeons of the Techno-Techno Order are authorized to carry out the installation of these technological marvels. The procedure is not as simple as it seems. Not only does it require making a link between living and nonliving matter, which requires proper compatibility to accommodate the interactive synergy of the organo-synthetic ebb and flow, but several extremely precise mini-lobotomies must also be carried out in order to maximize the brain's abilities. For example, while intuitive analysis (anterio-temporal area of the left hemisphere) is a very useful skill for Mentreks, compassion and empathy (posterior medulla in the right hemisphere) would obviously cause an undesirable reduction of efficiency. Once these surgical processes are complete, the Mentrek is totally unhampered by useless human emotion and is able under all conditions to devote 100% of his faculties to deductive observation. But he is still just an adolescent, and ahead lies a long path of learning to master his new abilities.

Then begins the final stage of Mentrek training. Over the course of seven years, the most precocious and promising children grow into eager and efficient servants. They are enlightened creatures in the area of intelligence and reasoning, but just dumb robots when it comes to feelings and emotion. They must achieve perfect mastery over their cerebral faculties, whose powers are so great that at any moment they can push the light of reason down into the depths of insanity. Indeed, the grouping of such vast and massive stores of information into one mind can produce instability, leading to internal whirlpools where all the mysteries of the universe dance in diabolical patterns. It takes a lot of time and patience to learn to manage a Mentrek brain. It's like taming a cruel and savage beast of phenomenal power. But the resulting feeling of triumph makes the task worthwhile. In the first year alone, twenty or thirty percent of the trainees go insane and, although the proportion decreases after that, each year has its share of "accidents." But those who make it to the end of this long period of training are now fully formed Mentreks, members of a unique clan, forever committed to their unquenchable thirst for knowledge and capable of contemplating the entire complexity of both the seen and unseen universe.

Privileges and Duties

Once the years of training are finished, the independent Mentrek, who is no longer entirely human, makes his debut in the real world. However, life for them does not resemble the life of other citizens in the slightest. Their sense of independence is not even remotely related to free will, nor do they enjoy the freedom of movement or all the minor rights that are common for mortals. In order to leave the Mentrek Training Center on the Central Planet, a Mentrek must be purchased by an authorized buyer. Once the negotiation has come to a successful conclusion, a subprogram is installed in the cybernetic portion of his brain and the Mentrek is allowed to go serve his new master.

Since it is known that they are literally incapable of lying, the Mentreks enjoy genuine respect from their peers. Primarily, it is the large Noble families and powerful Maganats who acquire these extremely costly marvels of technology. The Mentreks are granted total independence in the fulfillment of their new duties, since they can operate in a sphere far above what most humans can comprehend. The tasks they are given range from the drudgery of administrative accounting to the purity of intellectual and scientific speculation. But their true talent lies in devising Machiavellian plots. More specifically, the Mentreks who serve large families spend most of their time trying to predict the actions of members of other families and discover any resulting opportunities for their masters to show off their merits before the Empire. In this sense, they are reverting to their original function of making calcula-

tions for a complicated strategy game. But in this game, more than just prestige is at stake. The influential Noble Houses compete fiercely to acquire the most proficient Mentreks, since the outcomes of their calculation will either lead to new heights of shining glory or to a sudden descent into permanent ruin. In practice, the Mentreks have more duties than privileges, but since they have undergone a removal of the neural connections that transmit emotion and feeling, their duty weighs less heavily than a photon in the interstellar void.

The life of a Mentrek has its share of joy, as when a progression of cause and effect culminates precisely in the scenario he predicted and helped create. But, it also has its share of risk, as when the House he serves suffers a reversal of fortune. The pan-Techno Church, which manufactures every component of the cybernetic brain, keeps an extremely precise account of the Mentreks in active duty, at the same time grading them in order of proficiency. This hierarchy, based on the FishKarov scale, assigns each Mentrek a specific rating and market value. The thousand highest-scoring Mentreks are automatically assigned to the Circle of Imperial Mentreks. So of course, all the other Mentreks have the secret ambition of demonstrating in a spectacular manner that their worth is much greater than the rank they have been assigned. This pride is the only manifestation of their independent will. But all things considered, the Mentreks are fundamentally slaves, whose only escape lies in dreamlike fantasies of algebra and geometry.

All things considered, the cybernetic locking mechanism implanted within their brains effectively reduces them to mere thinking machines.. Cut off from their free will, they are denied their humanity. The Imperial Commission of Mentrek Surveillance constantly keeps a close watch on them, putting all of their actions through a screen and analyzing even the smallest piece of advice they give.. Of course, finding an idea within an idea or a conspiracy behind a conspiracy is extremely difficult, so it is hard to tell whether a Mentrek is acting on his own. So far, such a case has never come up, and these craftsmen of the mind seem to be content to fulfill the ambitions of their masters. But their powers are so great that the risk is always present. What if all the Mentreks decided to act in league with each other to achieve indirect domination of the universe by simple influence over the actions of the Empire's decision-makers…?

To counter that possibility, the Techno-Techno factory-labs routinely install a multi-purpose program into the Mentreks' brains, which has the ability to launch one of the dozens of failsafe control routines at the slightest sign of overactivity, indicated by a 10% variation from the subject's individual mean in three out of five major parameters (chemical balance of amino acids, neurological fluid pressure, cerebro-electrical activity, pH level in the gastric system, and temperature/hygrometry of the epidermis in the lumbar region). This automatic program re-establishes the Mentrek's internal balance by hypno-regulation, which to a certain degree forces his thoughts to stay within the nominated limits. In most cases, the mere activation of this procedure is enough to correct even the most convoluted train of thought, but two other levels of intervention are also available for greater security. A 20% variation in three of the major parameters instantly triggers a lockdown of the Mentrek's cerebral functions, followed by thorough scrutiny of all his neuro-transmitters and adjustments to four or five of the major parameters, while a 25% variation of three parameters immediately triggers self-destruction of the brain. To this day, no such case has ever occurred. In the normal scope of their activity, Mentreks rarely even suffer the slightest incident, and many of them forget the existence of this electronic sword of Damocles hanging constantly above their heads.

Activation of any of these control routines is recorded within the memory of the Central Brain of the Imperial Commission for Mentrek Surveillance. This organization, under the Empire's control, is guided by specialized machines overseen by the Techno-Pope. Nevertheless, the pan-Techno Church has no power to control the Mentreks' thoughts. But it can control the Mentreks themselves, or even annihilate them. In the end, what makes these creatures so interesting is that the seed of their own destruction has been planted within them, to compensate for their tremendous capacity that could slide out of control, disrupting the presently stable structure of the Empire. Their lives are lived in the delicate balance between the extremes of intellectual freedom and bodily subjugation. Of course, there is a way for them to cheat destiny, by thwarting Techno-Techno domination.

Mentrek Deconnection

To be exact, there are two methods for deconnecting a Mentrek and delivering him from the grip of Techno-Techno control. Either the technological tumor that governs his mind is simply removed, or its functions are bypassed in a more dramatic manner. The first option entails an extremely intricate and dangerous surgical operation, requiring the work of a specialized robo-surgeon. The procedure involves removing the mechanisms that separate the rational from the emotional. At this time, only the few "dissident" robots won over to the cause of the chromosomal force known as White Energy consent to perform it.

Of course, the dissident robots themselves are outcasts mercilessly hunted throughout the Empire. In the eyes of the Church of the Industrial Saints, they are not only heretics but also traitors who pose a threat to the workings of the world and the power of the Techno-Technos. However, the robots are not so easy to find. Although the surveillance equipment used by the pan-Techno Church is absolutely unsurpassed, it can only give totally predictable results when dealing with humans. When used against a foe who possesses the same resources they do, the systems, machines, and robots of the pan-Techno Church find themselves stalemated, and therefore the dissident robots are effectively undetectable. They can infiltrate circuits, creep into systems, and hack into networks without being spotted. However, their conversion to a new faith modifies their energy signature. In the bounds of virtual reality, they can operate unde-

tected, but in the real world, they'd be caught instantly by any competent cybo-cop, unless of course its own systems and controls were being hacked into. Their lives too are lived in a delicate balance. In any case, in various locations throughout the universe, generally in the depths of Endocities in the very heart of the Techno-Techno system, there exist robots who paradoxically show qualities of great humanity by sometimes helping Mentreks recover their freedom of will and thought.

In practice, any Mentrek who takes this drastic step becomes an outcast himself. Freedom has a price and the risks are enormous, for his own head is literally at stake. From that point on, he will have to maintain constant vigilance. A simple holo-mask will not suffice to deceive the Central Processor's police forces, so camouflage and concealment will make up the daily existence of any deconnected Mentrek. Besides, Techno-Techno officials are not their only enemies. A free Mentrek is no longer catalogued or supervised, but by the same token, he cannot count on the slightest protection. He becomes prey, and there are many predators who dream of getting access to his store of information by transplanting his head onto another human host. This procedure is extremely dangerous, and it is attempted only rarely. However, since information is power, certain groups will do anything to get their hands on this nearly infinite supply of data, even if doing so means death for the carrier and the sacrifice of an immense number of hosts in abortive attempts.

A much less technically demanding way to deconnect a Mentrek is to have a priest-mutant dose him with Amorine. Thanks to the power of the Amorine flower, initiates to the Cult of Neuro-Emotions are able to counteract and destroy the traces of the Techno-Technos' hold over their soul. Any Mentrek who lavishes himself with a full dose of Amorine can expect the artificial imbalance to be overcome, which leads to the recovery of his entire capacity for emotion and intuition. His lost humanity returns, but at the same time, he retains all the faculties provided to him by his training. Of course, depending on the Mentrek's innermost character, this change might be for the better or for the worse. The Mentrek who previously served his masters' ambitions is now free to put his power to the service of his own ambition.

Mentrek Characters

If you play the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* you can find templates for defused Mentreks on page 271 of the rule book and page 43 of the *Companion Book to the Game Master Screen*. If you would like to use these as generic characters, add 7D to 14D (depending on how experienced the characters should be) to the template skills. Mentreks who are not diffused will not have any *Agility*-type skills, nor will they have any equipment and little individuality.

The Endoguard

The Endoguard, a fighting force unrivalled anywhere in the Empire, is an elite unit that accepts only the bravest combatants into its ranks. But bravery is of little use without training, and the Endoguard is a crucible in which the most hardened, most determined, and most merciless warriors imaginable are forged.

Selection and Training

Great is the scope of the Endoguard. Primitive peoples in the farthest reaches of the universe whisper its name with fear and respect. To suffer and die for it is an honor. Life within the Endoguard is extremely severe, and it is arranged like an order of warrior-clergy who give themselves fully to the higher cause of military efficiency. But the choice to enlist is not a voluntary one. Every family in the Empire that is even remotely connected to a Noble line must donate its firstborn son to the military force. Thus, hundreds of thousands and sometimes even millions of children report every year to the Endoguard Training School, created specifically for this purpose by the Empire.

Although the sons of the Nobility are obliged to join the Empire's army, many of them do not have the natural qualities that make them great soldiers. For that reason, a program of Maximized Special Aptitude Training was developed by the greatest specialists and researchers at the dawn of the modern Imperial age. The program evolves in two stages, each designed to intensify the two separate criteria of tactical intuition and physio-mechanical prowess. For the first stage, which lasts until the children are twelve years old, an evaluation of physical and psychological characteristics is carried out on each subject, in accordance with extremely precise codified standards.. A scale is then developed from each of those profiles. In the second stage, from age twelve to age nineteen, the adolescents are put through hyperintensive training, including neuro-mnemonic induction drills, cerebral surgery, and whatever other forms of corrective operations are deemed necessary to produce an optimal balance of the two criteria. The program never fails, and at the end of trainingm each Endoguard will possess a perfect 50/50 competency ratio of maximized aptitudes in physio-mechanical prowess and tactical intuition.

There are many practical steps involved in the different stages of Endoguard training. In their first week of life, after they are taken from their families and placed in the official Endoguard Training School, a tracer-chip is implanted at the base of their medullas, in order to provide personally tailored telemetric tracking of each subject's physical and psychological parameters. Preliminary aptitude curves are plotted, after which each infant benefits from individual corrective actions designed to shore up their weak points (a nutritional regimen, neuro-psychological calibration by electric shocks, mini-lobotomies of the areas that control emotion and empathy, and surgical upgrades of the loco-motor apparatus and neurological systems). Aside from these exterior measures, the babies are led along a complete program of development and training. They must acquire the basic building blocks necessary for coordinated movement (walking, running, jumping, fighting, dodging) but also an understanding of tactical situations (evaluation of danger, optimal timing for attack and defense, identification of escape routes). In

addition to teaching them all these skills, everything is done to promote the natural instinct for savagery that lies dormant in every being. For example, the children are forbidden to lie down and must become accustomed to sleeping upright. The tiniest slip results in an electric shock administered by remote control. Although the food they are given provides a balanced supply of vitamins, proteins, and other essentials, it is totally devoid of any flavor. All minor pleasures of existence are forbidden to them, as is any recreational activity. The only so-called games that are permitted are the ones that encourage an unbridled expression of violence. Competition and confrontation are systematically encouraged. The young soldiers are never shown any sign of affection. They occasionally receive gifts of small animal-like creatures, but only with orders to torture or kill them. All in all, everything is done to develop their aggressive potential to the highest degree.

Age twelve marks a turning point in the life of an Endoguard. At this stage of development, his medulla is ready to receive the Gargat, a Netranekkon shaft that annihilates his individuality and reconfigures it around an exterior will. In this case, it is the will of the Emperoress that is imposed by the direct flow of the chain of command. It must be emphasized that the Gargat represents the only use of cybernetic implantation. As a result, each Endoguard is completely self-reliant: his physical force is not augmented by mechanical prostheses,but rather hardened by exercise and increased tenfold by chemical, electrical, and mechanical stimulation of his various systems (neurological, musculo-tendonary, and skeletal). His warrior instinct is not augmented by a device that influences his decision, but rather developed to its fullest by unrelenting training and the systematic development of his aggressive instinct and combat sense. However, the standard kit of an Endoguard includes a wide range of external devices designed to improve his physical performance: highly resistant armor, poly-mimetic uniforms with extensive camouflage abilities, mechanized exoskeletons for operations in very high gravity, automatic guidance for their aiming systems, and so forth. Such a high standard of equipment was developed with one goal in mind — to enable each Endoguard to survive in any environment and confront any enemy with any conceivable weapon. He can harness the full potential of even the most trivial item and turn any harmless object into a lethal weapon.

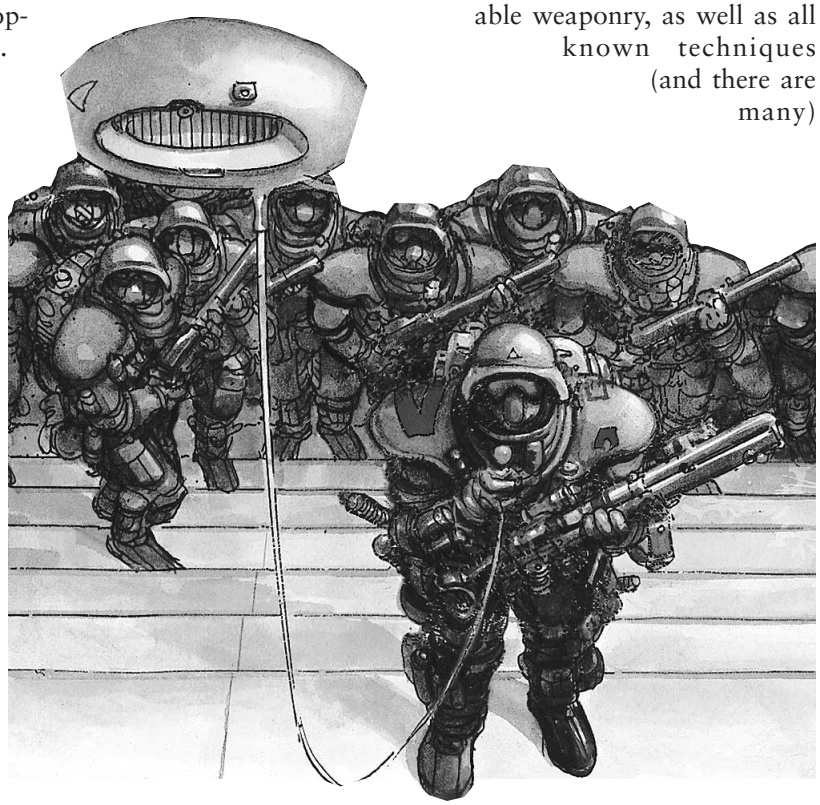
Just before the installation of the Gargat, an initiatory competition is held to select the most fearsome combatants from each year of the Endoguard Training School.

Those individuals who show greater malice, determination, and barbarity than the rest soon form the backbone of the regiments. For in the Endoguard, each level is commanded directly by the level above it, from the Minister of War (General Thato) down to the rank-and-file Endoguards, through the intermediary ranks of colonel, commander, captain, lieutenant, and sergeant. The Gargat provides an increased degree of initiative and free will with every advance through the ranks.

The young Endoguards selected in the competition join the force with the rank of cadet and are assigned to a fighting unit. The Endoguard cadets hardly have the power to speak. They express themselves in brief, hoarse shouts, and although they carry out complex missions, their capacity to analyze a given scenario remains negligible, which means that they cannot act or react outside the framework of their orders. They can annihilate entire villages, ward off retaliation, and entrap pockets of resistance, but if they receive information that the left flank of their troops is in trouble, they cannot make the decision to provide reinforcements. Those who survive the longest are promoted to the next rank.

An Endoguard sergeant, however, can address the larger analytical picture. He leads a group of about a hundred men and can use them in an effective and efficient manner. At the level of lieutenant, he might lead up to a thousand men, and so forth up the ranks. At the same time, an Endoguard recovers more of his faculties of memory and reasoning with every promotion, which enriches his vocabulary. A general, for example, may enter the salons of the Nobility without embarrassment.

To say that the Endoguards are like robots isn't entirely true: robots have a much broader range of functions. On the other hand, to say that they are dedicated killing machines is completely accurate. Until his assignment to an active unit at the age of nineteen, each Endoguard trains every single day to handle all conceivable weaponry, as well as all known techniques (and there are many)



for eradicating life in all its forms. As a result, they are obviously skilled operators of all existing artillery equipment, infallible sharpshooters, silent and efficient commandos, tireless marchers, seasoned pilots and navigators, and formidable warriors with nonprojectile weapons, including sticks and hand-to-hand combat. What's more, they are totally impervious to pain and demonstrate staunch bravery at every occasion. Indeed, the removal of certain irrelevant brain matter protects them from the paralysis of indecision.

After his comprehensive training is finished, each Endoguard is an expert in any field, capable of assuming duties in any one of the army's specialized units: Lancet pilot units assigned to the hunt, spatial engineering units assigned in different regiments primarily to supply and communications, and countless fighting units capable of performing in any surroundings.

Missions of the Endoguard

The Endoguard's military might is absolutely colossal. Its efficiency in conquest is feared and dreaded. To this day, the battle for Marmola is the only defeat it has ever suffered, although in that case it was not acting under orders. The various races and creatures that have the ill fortune to see their skies suddenly darken with Endoguard lancets can only appeal to providence or to their gods. Even today, some cultures put up savage resistance, but there is no limit to the destructive power of the Endoguard. When in difficulty, the army can depend on the arsenal of weapons supplied by the Techno-Technos, whose imaginative designs provide everything from the famous standard-issue multi-cogan to immense systems of kinetic destruction, capable of leveling a planet's surface from high orbit. There are various other weapons of controlled lethality, which permit the Endoguard to adjust the level of damage to the circumstances in order to obtain unconditional surrender. And finally, if their opponents prove intractable, the Endoguard can always resort to Biokill or Biocidex waves, two weapons of incomprehensible destructive capacity, which have the unfortunate side effect of wiping out absolutely all forms of life.

Of course, with such means at their disposal, there is scarcely any force in all the galaxies that can match their power, but the universe is wide and they cannot be everywhere at once. So although their primary mission is to enforce peace for the Emperoress, it would be infeasible for their purple vessels to maintain a constant presence across the entire universe. Normally, patrolling duties are left to the local armies on the Maganat and Colonial planets loyal to the Empire. In certain exceptional circumstances, such as trouble stirred up by some galacto-barbaric tribe, the Endoguard is immediately sent in to assist, and their presence alone will tip the scales of the battle. However, skirmishes at the edge of the universe are rare these days. More frequently, the Endoguard will be sent off to track down pirates, but usually with limited success. Although they manage to do some damage, the greater mobility of the pirate bands usually allows them to escape. A more crucial factor is that to this day, their lairs have never been found.

In times when they are not compelled by galactic crisis to maintain a battlefront far away from habitable worlds, the Endoguard devotes itself to the traditional military activities of maintaining peace and order. The Empire usually relies on surprise, letting out their dogs of war before even thinking of commencing negotiations. Whether it's a planet plunged into chaos, an Endocity troubled by anarchy, or a minor increase in revolutionary fervor in a given sector of the universe, the discouraging presence of the purple Endoguard quickly brings even the most stubborn militant uprising to heel. The strategy of the Endoguard is of course based solely on violence. No subtlety, no pretense, not the slightest reconnaissance, no psychological tactics, just pure brute strength. Victory or annihilation. And annihilation it is, at least for the reckless dreamers who thought they could take on the huge bull without getting the horns. In addition, like any typical army, the Endoguard devotes the rest of its time to training. Their life is war, and war is their life. Peace does not exist, and if they find war is occurring less frequently, they create it. As General Thato says, "The universe is so large there's always bound to be some conflict somewhere."

But their primary mission, and the field in which they truly excel, is conquest. The sight of their purple vessels taking position in the upper stratosphere of a planet before releasing swarms of transports and assault ships that swoop down toward the surface like paleo-vultures is an unforgettable spectacle. And to watch Endoguard platoons subdue a continent is no less spectacular.

The Supreme Endoguard

The Endoguard's strength and durability is like a rock, but unfortunately so is their level of finesse. If by some chance their brutal force does not prevail, the Endoguard would find itself incapable of acting or reacting. Of course, that situation has not arisen to this day, but it is always possible that somewhere in the universe the Endoguard will encounter some race, some force, or some form of intelligent life with powers they cannot match. In addition, that is not the only risk, for it could be imagined that some demented will within the Empire itself could steer the Endoguard troops onto the wrong path. If so, the automatic and unquestioning fanaticism it uses to carry out its missions could lead to disastrous consequences. What would happen if someone had access to the decision-making mechanisms of the Endoguard, and gave them instructions to completely reduce the universe to rubble?

Thanks to His-Her boundless foresight, and perhaps also to some advice from a wise Mentrek, the Emperoress instituted a plan to counter any such eventuality. After all, the Endoguard's great force is also its greatest weakness. Its reinforced brutality is also its Achilles' heel. The Empire exerts total control over all the workings of the Endoguard and can therefore always count on their flawless warlike enthusiasm and utter loyalty. But the command structure is as dense and unresponsive as a paleo-brick wall and could suddenly become unmanageable, precisely because of the overabundant powers at its dis-

posal. To prevent this possibility, among other reasons, the Supreme Endoguard was formed.

On the surface, the Supreme Endoguard is simply the most elite branch of an army that already has no equal. It is designed to be the last line of defense around the Emperoress if the need arises. But in truth, it is much more than that. Its 10,000 members are selected according to their IQ, an irrelevant criterion in the case of the regular Endoguard. Therefore, the Supreme Endoguard has the advantage, because its soldiers can contemplate, analyze, perceive, or comprehend motivations and interactions between people, in addition to sequences of cause and effect. This allows them to get to the bottom of tangled webs of intrigue, as well as take command and act with complete autonomy in any delicate situation. Upon full consideration, each man's rare abilities make him a tremendous asset to the Empire but also a potential mortal danger, a viper at its breast. To ensure the loyalty of these elite soldiers with no roots, no connections, and no past, who have developed their minds, the most dangerous weapon of all, Janus-Jana has them injected at a very young age with a microbe so potent that no vaccine can completely cure it. Then, in order not to undergo a horribly painful death, they must take an antidote at regular and relatively frequent intervals. The antidote's formula is a secret known only to the Emperoress.

Although the Supreme Endoguard presents a tremendous internal threat to the Empire, it is a truly fascinating unit. It not only guarantees personal protection to the Emperoress, but it is sent out to assist on any missions that require a delicate and subtle touch. For example, they might carry out infiltration, exfiltration, espionage, recovery, sabotage, theft, or seduction, in all conditions and all environments on all types of worlds. In this way, the most elite soldiers of the most elite army are grouped into an ultra-secret unit in order to carry out a variety of tasks, both noble and base, for the greater glory of the Sacred Androgyne.

Further Reading

The *Metabarons Guidebook #1 to Path of the Warrior* presents some additional notes on the Black Endoguard (pages 10–11), the Purple Endoguard (page 11), and the Supreme Endoguard (page 15).

If you're playing the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* realize that, in general, no one plays an Endoguard. The will of the individual Endoguard is totally controlled by those in the rank above. Nonetheless, it is a remote possibility that there are descendants of the Black Endoguard from the botched Marmola mission. They now would be guns-for-hire, working on assignments as far from the center of the Empire as possible.

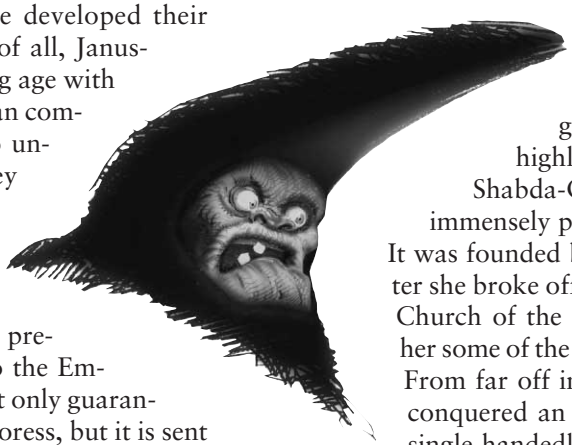
Typical Endoguard Cadet

This generic character can be used with the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game.*

Agility 4D: brawling 5D, dodge 5D, firearms 6D, melee combat 5D, running 5D. Knowledge 2D: survival 4D. Mechanical 3D: gunnery 4D, piloting 4D, vehicle operation 4D. Perception 3D+1: search 4D+1. Strength 3D+2: lift 5D+2, stamina 5D+2. Technical 3D. Psionics 0D. Move 10. Character Points 3. Amarax Points 0. Honor Code: Rayah. Equipment: multi-cogan rifle (6D damage), combat shock knife (STR+1D+2 damage), Endoguard armor (+2D STR to resist damage; –1D *Agility*), helmet with range goggles (+3D to long-range *Perception* and *search* rolls), comm headset. Note: Cadets will proceed with their current orders, reguardless of the consequences to themselves or others, until their superior — and only the correct superior — gives them a new one.

The Shabda-Oud

The Origins of the Holy Shabda-Oud Mystery



These women, feared so much they are dubbed "witches" and "whore-nuns," are servants of the god Jejoh and members of a highly influential female order. The Shabda-Oud order was destined to be immensely powerful right from the outset. It was founded by Techno-Popess Argatah after she broke off all contact with her lover, the Church of the Industrial Saints, taking with her some of the Church's best-guarded secrets. From far off in space, she could easily have conquered an entire section of the universe single-handedly and become its empress or divinity. Yet her chance travels through the outermost reaches of space dictated otherwise.

Two meetings were to mold her fate. In the outer reaches of space where the darkness is like an all-consuming living liquid, the Techno-Popess stumbled upon a giant planet-sized female whale in labor. Driven from her hiding place, the animal started to charge the tiny ship that had dared disturb her. But just as her brain was converting her reflex into a conscious order, a domineering force in amplified Alpha waves overcame her will. Before she could even fight, the whale was subdued.

Argatah screened every part of her vast stellar captive's mind and body and found to her delight that this enormous and virtually indestructible mass was about to give birth to seven baby females. And, since good things always come in pairs, her mental structure showed the seeds of a distinct submissive inclination. The Techno-Popess used a subtle process of hypno-mental induction, alternating periods of strict punishment and consolation, to make the whale as devoted to her as a bashful lover is to his mistress. The seven babies underwent the same treatment, and with a technological arsenal attached to her creatures, the Techno-Popess found herself at the head of a formidable and invincible fleet.

Later in her exploration of the stellar ice floes, she discovered a Jejoh trapped in the salty ice. This simple crea-

ture with his supreme conquering drive opened up new horizons for her. His burning energizing fluid largely made up for his rustic intellect. Now with a fleet, technological power and a god, or as good as, all that was left for the former Techno dignitary to do was to gather followers and launch the takeover of the Empire.

The Rise of the Order

With the troops recruited, the order set to work on a huge galactic plan to take over Imperial power. The idea was to create a perfect Hermaphrodite that the order would control. Unfortunately for the Shabda-Oud witches, this ambitious scheme was also to be their downfall. To increase its chances of success, the order carefully chose its most beautiful followers and trained them in the subtle mysteries of sexual energy. And Jejoh taught them just how far sensual pleasure could be taken with the "waking of the hundred flowers" rite. The Shabda followers then used their thorough mental control of every part of their bodies to give their sexual partners the pleasure that would enslave them. Hundreds of strictly trained young Shabda novices were sent out into the universe with a mission to seduce and enslave the most suitable reproducers —the richest and most powerful and dependable —and be fertilized by the genes most likely to create the perfect Hermaphrodite. This program continued for thousands of years without any great success until one day, the Empire offered Honorata — a young accomplished novice — to Metabaron Othon.

And Downfall…

The operation was very nearly a success.

Out of her overwhelming love for Othon, Honorata pulled off nothing short of a miracle. She bypassed the normal course of nature and fertilized one of her eggs at subcellular level with a drop of Othon's blood. But instead of giving birth to the perfect Hermaphrodite the Shabda priestesses so yearned for, she had a son fit to succeed his father. The purest and deepest of emotions had changed the course of history. With their ambitions thwarted, the Shabda-Oud witches declared war against the most powerful war machine in the universe. Othon managed to destroy one of the supposedly invincible cetacyborgs in the first battle, but it was a bitter victory. Othon had contracted an incurable disease and Honorata had to sacrifice herself. Left alone, Aghnar, sonof Honorata and Othon, succeeded his father and vowed to hunt down and destroy the Shabda-Oud.

While Aghnar was polishing his weapons, the Shabda witches were still trying to pull off their pipe dream. Once again, tragic and cruel fate brought the order of the whore-nuns face to face with the Metabaron in a brutal clash. With the help of his beautiful beloved Oda, who he sent to infiltrate the heart of the Shabda movement, Aghnar challenged and fought the god Jejoh and the order's novices and superiors. He had to use all the psycho-magic skills his mother had taught him to win the epic telepathic duel and liquefy the murderous witches' spirits. Yet Oda's brain also succumbed to the assault, and the order's seven cetacyborgs were on the verge of killing Aghnar when Honorata appeared from the beyond to save him. As a senior initiate aware of the fabulous organic vessels' weak point, she alone could defeat them.

Yet what the anguished Aghnar and Honorata did not know was that the Shabda-Oud order had not been completely destroyed. Far off on the stellar ice floe, deep in the Prime Temple, the ten mother superiors had watched the destruction of Planet Diamond and the cetacyborgs from afar. And they were already preparing to rekindle the Shabda flame and form the order of the Neo-Shabda-Oud.

Further Reading

The *Metabarons Guidebook #1 to Path of the Warrior* contains several discussions of the Shabda-Oud and some of their resources. Information on cetacyborgs can be found on pages 47–48 of this book. Details on the Neo-Shabda-Oud is located on pages 48–50.

If you are playing the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* you can find generic Neo-Shabda-Oud characters on pages 50–53 of Guidebook #1. Pages 53–57 of the same book offer hooks and sketches for adventures involving the Neo-Shabda-Oud.

If you're looking for a Neo-Shabda-Oud template, that's on page 281 of the rule book. Information on how the psionics of the Shabda-Oud work in game terms can be found on pages 83–89 of the rule book.

Inquisition

After Argatah's defection, all of the Techno-Techno Order's nuns suspected of sympathizing with their secessionist Techno-Popess underwent an ordered assault from the Techno-inquisitors. The majority however, remained faithful to the Magnus Dei, but an implacable handful of devotees escaped and went into hiding. Hunted throughout space, they remained concealed for two long standard years, until Argatah sent them a mental message….

The Metabaron

No Name was born in the year 29970, son of his father-mother Aghora and distant descendant of Baron Dayal de Castaka, who took over the planet Marmola and absorbed the spirit of the legendary Gangez bird, one of the six Gargales of the universe. Heir to the Bushitaka tradition and from a long line of invincible metawarriors — in turn adventurers, mercenaries, and soldiers of the Empire — the reigning Metabaron is hero of the human race and champion of the Empire. He is a self-styled, protective shadow who brings both hope and threat to man. With the spirit of Gangez in him, No Name has all the power of one of the guardians of the six gateways of the universe. Yet he does not give a damn about the duties of his office and uses his powers solely for his own personal pleasure.

The Caste

Othon, No Name's great-great-grandfather, was the first true Metabaron. He took the tradition of humble service to the Mardador gateway and the epiphyte to a higher level and transcended the Bushitaka. Yet nothing set him up for such a life, except perhaps his obstinate and cast-iron determin-ation. Othon was actually a common orphan from the gutter. Before marrying into the family, he was nothing more than a space desperado who hung out with the wreckage looters and ship hijackers. They had even usurped the identity of the Noble von Salza, who gave up without a fight when they boarded his luxury space-yacht. Yet once on board the pirate ship, von Salza smugly informed the young Othon that his yacht obeyed him alone and that an inviolable iris-based identity detector prevented anyone from taking his place. Othon calmly returned his self-satisfied smile. Then he jumped on him, got him in a half nelson, and ripped out his eyes.

Othon's enrollment with the Castaka Caste did not redeem him, but it did elevate him through his observance of Bushitaka and strict adherence to personal life principles. This move also set in motion a tragic chain of events scored with death. Othon and each Metabaron in turn — Aghnar, Steelhead, and

1: The Non-Baron Dayal of Castaka (13626–28686)
2: The Mono-Duchess Antigréa of Castaka (13628–13660)
3: The Twins Myrtha and Narda (13645–?)
4: The Non-Baron Berard of Castaka (29820–29892)
5: Edna Berard of Castaka (29861–29892)
6: The Metabaron Othon von Salza (29857–29913)
7: Honorata (29872–29918/29951)
8: Bari of Castaka (29876–29892)
9: The Metabaron Aghnar von Salza (29893–29951)
10: Supra-Princess Oda the Capricious (29899–29918)
11: Doña Vicenta Gabriela of Rokha (29931-29992)
12: The Metabaron Steelhead/Melmoth von Salza (29919–29969)
13: The Metabaron Aghorha von Salza (29952–29989)
14: The Metabaron No Name (29970–)

Aghora — would subsequently embark on personal crusades during which they would battle with the major forces of the universe or at least the great Pillars of the Empire. The Metabaron's aura and ruthlessness grew with each victory. His battles — and the battles of his forefathers — helped each Metabaron realize his true vocation, and so each found himself becoming increasingly more detached from the rest of humankind floating in the Necro-Dream.

Today, No Name is condemned to a life of roaming solitude, tirelessly pursued by his equally ruthless enemies. He has fled and hidden in another universe, entered using his "living gateway" power, returning only when absolutely necessary.

The Value and Number of Years

Othon was just fourteen-years-old when he took von Salza's vessel, eyes, and identity. He found two young boys on board, eight-year-old twin brothers Konrath and Hohenhole, who were living in slavery as von Salza's servants. He took them along with everything else, and the twins never left his side.

The Tests

To become the Metabaron, it's not enough to be born into the right family. The child must also prove his worthiness. He first demonstrates his readiness to pursue the mantle of Metabaron by enduring ritual mutilation. In general, this ritual happens after years of intense and violent training. After this point, the future Metabaron's true training begins. The child — perhaps a young adult by now — refines his honor code and further develops his abilities as a formidable soldier. For it is only by force, through the death of his father, that the child can become the supreme warrior of the universe.

The Arsenal

The Metabaron has long been ahead of his adversaries and has lost his taste for combat. Isolated and eternally alone, No Name lives in long, excruciating boredom. This might be his fate as a living gateway, but the Metabaron's fanatical individualism and sharp awareness of his caste's dramatic lot in life have driven him to expand and transform his office. He neither chose nor was chosen to be Gargale. He became so simply because the official Gargale passed his position and powers on to him. Since that act, with blithe disregard for the universal balance, his immeasurable mine of power has made him equal to a god in the Human Universe. Nobody can challenge him, not even the Empire and all its Endoguards. Yet, he is still mortal like all the guardians. But No Name is far from easy prey. His remarkable Metabaron arsenal of fantastic, ultimate-technological weapons — including the Metacraft, the Metabunker, and the Tri-H bombs that he casually sets off — is combined with the fabulous sources of power he can harness to form a lethal extension of his own will.

With his size and power, the Metabaron is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating figures in the universe.

The Family Arms

There are two particularly important weapons in the Metabaron arsenal: the Metasword and the Metapistol. The nearly indestructible telescopic Metasword is made of the Gangez bird's incredibly hard spinal cord salvaged by Baron Dayal de Castaka. The Metapistol is the only one of its kind with such special properties. It is designed to fire huge silver bullets at stellar werewolves, those enormouse hairy creatures that roam through space from full moon to full moon.

Further Reading

Naturally, you can follow the history of the Metabaron lineage in the pages of *The Metabarons* comic series (which are also compiled in trade paperbacks).

The *Metabarons Guidebook #1 to Path of the Warrior* offers a great deal of information gleaned from and inspired by the pages of the first trade paperback. You might, in particular, find these parts most interesting.

People in the Metabarons Line

- Non-Baron Berard of Castaka, page 9
- Lady Edna of Castaka, page 8
- Metabaron Othan von Salza, pages 12–13
- Bari of Castaka, page 10
- Honorata, pages 15–16
- Agnar, page 20

Servants to the Metabarons Line

- Konrath, page 9
- Hohenhole, pages 9–10
- Iku-Tta, pages 4–5
- Ika-Tua and Ika-Toa, pages 5, 6

Places

- Marmola, pages 22–23
- Okhar, pages 23–25
- Anasirma (on Okhar), page 36

Technology

- bio-electrogram, pages 27–28
- gun sword, page 28
- Maxi-protonic Tower, 30
- Metabunker, pages 38–40
- robo-killer, page 37
- sparring robot, page 27
- Tri-H torpedoes, pages 34–35

Honor Code

What sets the Metabaron apart from ordinary humanity is the honor code he follows. You can get more information about the Bushitaka Honor Code on page 38 of the rule book and on pages 5–6 the *Companion Book to the Game Master Screen.*

The Pirates

The pirates operate everywhere in space, robbing and pillaging transporter vessels that cross the cosmos. The

authorities give this name to an extremely wide range of individuals. In short, anyone that the Empire can gain from eliminating is called a "pirate" — from rebels revolting against oppression by the Nobles through petty thieves to your average Joe unlucky enough to offend someone with more power. But in actual fact, the buccaneering fraternity only accepts organized bands that do enough pirating to be hunted by the Empire's forces. The pirates form a society of their own, which sometimes counteracts the Empire's power and control. There are countless independent bands operating close to their hideouts, as well as larger bands capable of devising and carrying out much more ambitious plans.

The most famous of these groups is without doubt Captain Kaiman's band.

Structure and Activities

The organized bands of pirates are havens for outcasts from the Empire and the universe. They comprise men, women, mutants, and all kinds of creatures who have crossed the red line of no return. Their only hope of survival is to flee, always staying one step ahead of the Empire's forces. For most of them, it would be instant suicide to go to an even remotely civilized world. However, their immense resources mean that they can sustain networks and branches that reach far into the very heart of the Imperial administration itself. Gold works miracles. The petty traffickers and smugglers tolerated by the authorities are their go-betweens, their eyes and ears in society.

The pirates are masters in the art of camouflage. They can hide on the smallest asteroid and the tiniest comet. They do whatever it takes to obtain the weapons and technology they need to get the better of the StellCom patrols and the local militia. The Endoguard units are the only real thorn in their side, but there are too few of them to pacify all the zones in space. So, like a huge game of hide-and-seek, they play games with the authorities and lay their traps on well-traveled routes before disappearing into the desolate vastness of space.

Their favorite hunting grounds are around the Techno-Tunnels in the huge perimeter surrounding the portals, where heavy vessels have to operate at less than the speed of light. Here, they spring out in swarms and swoop down on their prey. The pirate frigates and brigs rush to the attack. Their speed and daring in this delicate maneuver is wondrous to behold. Show no mercy! The defense batteries punch mortal holes in the pirates' ranks, but the law of numbers is on their side. They quickly manage to open a breach and scramble for the spoils. There are tales that some pirate commandos have been jettisoned in a jet suit, armed only with a formidable negative mine. They reach the tunnel's shell, arm it, and the released antimatter pierces a gaping hole in the defenses.

The pirate flagship is generally an Ostrov-class ship. It is from here that the pirate captain directs operations from his position set back some stellar cable's length from the battle. If victory smiles on the buccaneers, it is here too that the booty is divvied up and the party begins. The most callous pirates systematically kill human captives, though they will use more valuable hostages to save their own skins.

Hispanola and Tortuga

While they are hounded throughout the cosmos, the pirates do have two safe places where they can rest in total safety. Although the authorities think that these places are pure myth, Hispanola and Tortuga really do exist. They are vast hollow planets teeming with exotically varied life where extraordinary trade has developed. In particular, all sorts of illegal artificial limbs are sold to proud wounded pirates to replace their amputated limbs without any risk of falling into the clutches of the Techno-Technos.

Rites and Tales

These terrifying cohorts of damned souls generally have little respect for anything, but they do like a certain form of tradition. For example, the sharing out of the booty and R&R on Hispanola or Tortuga are always followed by a week-long orgy. Guanaguachca liqueur, the pirates' favorite tipple, flows freely at these events. They often also take Tranka — the famous dangerous drug that relieves the harmful effects of the Necro-Dream, if you manage to survive it.

Along the same lines, it is common practice to haze newcomers. This can range from savage teasing to pure sadism. The pirates also respect the ritual for prisoners with no market value: the pretty women are eagerly raped and the men thrown into space. They are forced into air locks from which they are violently sucked into the void, much to the amusement of the crew gathered in the gangways. And no pirate ship would even think about going on a raid without running up a holographic skull and crossbones flag.

The pirates love to screech songs about illustrious pirates who are examples to the younger generations. Top of the list is obviously Captain Kaiman. Then there's "Copper Beard," the fearsome armless woman pirate with her strange but magnificent shiny red beard, who personally decapitates her prisoners. Next comes "Hardheart the Cannibal," the mutant shark-headed pirate who devours his victims, and "Devil Shadow," the mysterious figure of a black pirate whose face has never been seen. This may seem like a pleasant portrait gallery, but don't forget that the pirate world is mainly one of fear and violence, and that life in their world is the cheapest commodity.

The Five Leading Pirate Communities

The Wreckers

This group, commanded by the legendary Captain Kaiman, has long been plundering intersidereal space. Their

The Corsairs

The Corsairs are cousins of the pirates, although they would take offence at being called so. They have exactly the same customs and practices, but they act under orders from one or another powerful caste, generally the Ekonomat. Their combat techniques are more sophisticated since they generally have inside information, which makes their attacks less risky. The Ekonomat Corsairs also have an additional advantage in the form of awesome stacked hyper-desiccating weapons.

"mythical hideout" Tortuga is said to be in the Bathalgar-gamma system, but no one has ever found it. Not surprising really, since it is inside a hollow asteroid. Kaiman was born a Noble, but he was abandoned by his family because he had a mutation. Although he keeps the Paleo-Nobilis principles, he deeply hates the Empire and the Nobility.

The Bloodsuckers

The pirates under the fierce iron rule of Captain Hardheart — a mutant who inherited the head, aggressiveness, and insatiable bloodthirstiness of a shark — specialize in lightning raids on small and medium-sized planets. The roving pirates' armada has never yet been intercepted, and they are notorious for leaving no survivors.

The Harpooners

These pirates are headed by Captain Marouf-the-Crazy, a "cracked" Mentrek in all senses of the term. He murdered Captain Karmaro to take his place when he was his right-hand man. Marouf-the-Crazy is totally paranoid and constantly extends his memory capacity, which makes him even more nuts. As their name suggests, their specialty is harpooning space vessels — an art in which they excel!

The Brothers of the Fringe

The captain of these pirates is called Copper Beard, a redheaded woman with an enormous beard whose arms were torn off in a Troglosocialiks raid on her home planet. She survived in the midst of the worst scum in the universe, driven by her avid hatred and thirst for revenge. Later, she acquired two illegal exo-bionic arms, which gave her exceptional strength. With her new attributes, she assembled a rabble of rogues and called them the Brothers of the Fringe. They operate mainly on the borders of the Empire, systematically attacking Colonial vessels. No one knows where their hideout is, but it is thought that the Brothers of the Fringe are helped by populations recently conquered by the Empire.

The Buccaneers of the Outback

Commanded by Captain Devil Shadow, a black-skinned human, the Buccaneers are essentially black galactic-barbarians. They operate in the outback of space and sometimes carry out missions to save Aquaend prisoners.

Pirate Template

This template can be used with the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*. Suggested skills are given after the governing attribute.

Agility 3D+1: brawling, dodge, firearms, melee combat, running. Knowledge 2D: survival. Mechanical 3D+2: comm, gunnery, piloting. Perception 3D: con, gaming, search. Strength 3D: lift, stamina. Technical 3D: demolitions, flight systems repair, personal equipment repair. Psionics 0D. Move 10. Character Points 5. Amarax Points 1. Honor Code: Rayah. Equipment: Armored vest (+1D STR to resist damage, torso only), heavy service pistol (5D damage), jumpsuit, 2 kublars.

The Mercenaries

These seemingly free men who take on and fight for any cause for the noble motive of money are actually lackeys of the most powerful secret group in the universe: the order of the Techno-Technos.

The Death Trade

Never in the history of humanity has life been so cheap and never have the motives for making war been so many and the weapons so terrifying. So it is inevitable that skilled manpower will sometimes run low. To overcome this shocking problem, the Church of the Industrial Saints has constructed a system to carefully channel energy and skills to its greatest advantage and customer satisfaction.

There is no shortage of trained veterans and young hotshots eager to fight. They are encouraged to sign up with their nearest Mercenary Office recruitment center to prevent them from being tempted to join a dissident group, which would waste their talents and undermine the Empire. They simply fill in Form 28B-6 and a life of adventure is theirs. Obviously, it's a life that will probably be short, but the main thing is to live it to the fullest.

Banzai!

In its infinite wisdom, the Church of the Industrial Saints offers its customers savings with the kamikaze-mercenaries. These little marvels have many advantages. Before the suicide operation, the volunteer's brain is put in a Techno-trance with the insertion of a probe into the cortex. On impact and clinical death, the mercenary's personality is salvaged from space and immediately cloned into a new body. The only drawback is that the new body is untrained, although training takes barely one standard month in the Techno-induction training programs.

The War Star

Applicants for a career as a mercenary are assembled in vast orbital centers — one per system — and then taken to the War Star, the mysterious Techno-Techno

planet in a secret astronomical location. They make the trip in a deep artificial sleep. The real trials start as soon as they arrive. They are examined, appraised, scrutinized, evaluated, and finally tested. The aptitude test decides whether they make the grade. It is a virtual battle on a simulation machine. The immersion effect is total. All of the soldiers' faculties are examined: reflexes, cool-headedness, decision-making, reactions, survival instinct, determination and ferocity. The aim is to survive as long as possible in this virtual world, and this is the criterion that determines the number of Dhans attributed to each applicant. Dhans represent a mercenary's market value. It is an open scale, but no one has ever received above 100, although it goes without saying that the Metabaron is off the scale. Mercenaries typically introduce themselves with something like: "Marzo, from the planet Solius, dead on the sixty-third Dhan."

The Techno-Techno order has endeavored to rationalize the system by improving the selection mechanism. Hopeless candidates who die before the fifth Dhan in virtual reality also die in real life. Their survival instinct is far too low for them to become mercenaries, and there's no point posting them elsewhere where life is far too dangerous anyway.

The Guild's Neo-Tradesman

Recent diploma-holding guild graduates, the neo-tradesmen search by every means possible to make up the cost of their studies and put into practice the fruit of their theoretical courses. Their sole priority is to buy, sell, extort, lie, deceive, make profitable, amass, accumulate, and rake in the greatest amount of kublars possible in the shortest amount of time. The unspoken dream of these pure products of the system is invariably to be recognized by the highest commercial spheres of the Guild — a promise of financial notice and social status, as well as a future rich in kublars.

The Imperial Merchants and Ekonomat Traders

Local trading is left up to individual initiative. The sale of food and other trivial necessities is too petty to interest the major groups. However, stellar trade in colossal sums with astronomical royalties is exclusively controlled by the Imperial Merchants and Ekonomat Traders.

Mission: Profit

The rarer a good, the higher its value. This goes for all commodities from minerals and raw materials to manufactured products produced by a population's own special know-how. The representatives of the Guild of Imperial Merchants and Ekonomat Traders — alone authorized by the authorities to trade — travel the length and breadth of space looking for resources and merchandise that will supply the production chains and penetrate all societal levels. Dangerous missions, especially the exploration of chaotic zones, are often subcontracted to specialized teams, and the Ekonomat Traders have a vast fleet of probe-ships working for them. The Guild leaves the job up to the huge Techno-Techno factory-laboratories and their galactic sleuths, who track down even the smallest seam to be carved up.

When the riches are on a world that belongs to a powerful family in favor with the Golden Palace or any other entity whose power cannot be ignored, Merchants and Traders have to come to a compromise. For example, the Guild's delegation used to negotiated with the Castaka clan for marble on Marmola. However, they don't think twice about using other methods with weak and powerless groups.

Raptors and Vultures

Backed up by the Techno-assassin legions, their formidable metamorphs, and even the Endoguard units if need be, the Imperial Merchants' trading tactics are frequently tantamount to a hard and fast dictatorial ultimatum. On Fillodendra, for example, where huge seams of bikramen were found, the population was given a simple choice of leaving or dying. Led by Don Nicanor Rosamel de Rokha, they chose the second option and would surely have been wiped out had it not been for Metabaron Steelhead.

The Ekonomat Traders operate just as aggressively, albeit more discreetly, with their Corsairs. Not that they are held back by conscience or scruples. They simply cannot risk drawing the greedy attention of the Imperial Merchants, who would not have any qualms about using their dominant position to snatch the riches from the Ekonomat's hands. Birds of prey are not in the habit of giving anyone a break.

Ships

Getting around in the universe requires the right kind of vehicle — and the Imperial Merchants Guild and the Eknomat Traders have them. You can find more information about the Imperial Merchants Guide cargo dreadnaught on pages 251–252 of the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* rule book. Details on Eknomat vessels are on pages 253–255 of the rule book.

The Neo-Tarologists

The Neo-Tarologist caste stands apart in the Empire and even the universe for their ability to see into the future, but also and above all, because there are only four of them.

The most well known is the Imperial Neo-Tarologist Goyo-Vah, a twofold initiate who knows the mysteries of paleo-tarot and neo-tarot. His brain contains 78 metal shoots that constantly vibrate in two distinct planes of reality. These extraordinary qualities make him so invaluable that the Emperoress cannot make any major decision without consulting him first. This incontestable master of the mysteries lives the life of a recluse at the Court on Golden Planet, spending most of his time studying and

meditating. He is a reference for all the other Neo-Tarologists, who consider themselves to be his students, even if they do not admit as much.

The second most well-known Neo-Tarologist in the universe is Raymonde le Rubis, who calls herself a "galactic neo-prophetess." Also a palmist when the fancy takes her, Raymonde practices neo-palmistry in a traveling stellar circus that performs from galaxy to galaxy. She has a flattering reputation, and some of her predictions made live on huge hypertele shows are famous throughout the entire universe. Raymonde's other talents include fortune telling using her famous ruby — a huge 5,682-carat stone, which never leaves her side. A handful of well-informed people — three to be precise — know that the ruby is actually the mineral stomach of an insectoid creature who lives with its head in a membrane that is an inexhaustible source of igneous honey. However, what no one knows it that Raymonde is really just an android puppet controlled by the insect, which is the one that really has the divining powers.

Next comes Occiputal-Cogito, a rather special kind of Neo-Tarologist. He was awakened in the same way as Goyo-Vah, with the insertion of 78 metal shoots into his brain. But Occiputal-Cogito is different. His body is his brain, a huge, three-meter wide cephalic sphere immersed in a liquid regenerator. The 78 shoots are planted like needles in a ball of wool made of soft pinkish flesh, making them look like a crown of thorns. Each shoot is linked by a bluish piezoelectric arc to a relay console. This is connected by a glass cable a few meters long to another brain ten times larger. Occiputal-Cogito is the divining brain of Central Planet's Supreme Central Brain.

The last member of this tiny caste is Renovahl, a mutant Neo-Tarologist who lives on the planet Novahl-Re, a small sphere lost in the beyond whose primitive population worships him as a virtual god. As you would fully expect, Renovahl is an ally of the aliens and mutants who abound in the area. Renovahl was crossbred from human chromosomes and a plant gene, giving him a long neck that grows not unlike a palm tree. The head at the end of his neck — easily recognizable from its halo of 78 brilliant rings — is never the latest. It regularly withers and dries up to be replaced by another bud.

Renovahl is currently on his 121st head. A prophecy tells of a major upheaval when he reaches his 333rd head.

The Amok Rebels

The Amok is a hideout for mutineers, deserters, and rebels who live in its vast underground structure, which harbors the most down-and-out creatures of the catacombs and extends its influence over numerous worlds. In addition to taking in, caring for and helping dissidents from all over, the Amok rebels constantly fight the established order. In the endocities, the Prez is their enemy and the robocops, their adversaries. Although they are openly at war with the Empire and its henchmen, their tactic is mainly to help out in small ways, which, although daring, are limited in their effectiveness. The Amok can also be found on all planets with good reason to rebel.

The Amok is highly structured, organized, and operates under the unchallenged authority of the "Godmother." Few know her real identity, but everyone in the ghetto respects her sovereignty. The Godmother is the queen of the Amok, the power of the depths — this secret, buried place from where she directs dissidence.

Next come the Madonnas, the mistresses of the underworld. They are the voice and conscience of the Godmother everywhere the Amok is found. They make sure that the rebellion is properly organized and keep the sacred flame burning.

Last but not least, come the military wing, the Children of the Amok, a huge motley crew without any real structure, but with three distinct adult sub-groups — as listed below — plus one group for the children, the Kids.

- *The Guards:* Soldiers, assassins, sentries
- *The Resources:* Volunteers helping in various areas: supplies, technical, mechanical
- *The Watch:* Moles, secret agents
- *The Kids*

Hypertele Rebel

From their secret hideout on the artificial satellite Sierra Maestra, a tiny archeo-castroite group sends out unauthorized broadcasts across the galaxies, exhorting the oppressed masses to take up arms and overturn dictators of all kinds. Without any forewarning, a holographic image of the archeo-castroite icon "paleo-Che" unexpectedly appears in the most improbable places, and enters into an inflammatory discourse suitable for waking the dulled conscious of people plunged into the Necro-Dream. The authorities make half-hearted attempts to track down these activists, whose actions, instead of stirring up hard-line terrorism, most often result in bringing about folkloric notions of nostalgia.

The Children of the Amok

The Guards carry out the Amok's ground operations, which does not mean that they are the only ones prepared to fight. All the members of the Amok are armed rebels, but the Guards are specialized and seasoned troops. They are formidable warriors, albeit slightly underarmed.

The Resources are the largest Amok group, accounting for 80% of the rebellion's numbers. These millions of willing volunteers support the Godmother and her Children every day, sometimes with just the simplest gesture.

The Watch group's moles and secret agents are active but discreet combatants who infiltrate the order's machinery and risk their lives for the cause.

Last but not least, the Kids are made up of the hundreds of thousands of rebel children who inhabit the murky levels of the Endocities and the ghettos of other worlds. They roam the streets in gangs, pinch anything that could be useful, and eavesdrop on everyone.

Common Professions of the Human Empire

Endocities

3DTV Cameraman
3D Journalist
Amok Rebel
Amorine Guardian
Aristo
Body Guard (upper levels)
Body Guard
Defused Mentrek
Detective
Drug Dealer
Fallen Aristo
Guild Merchant
Mentrek
Mercenary
O'lock (Thief)
Pilot
Pre-detective (apprentice)
Prostitute
Proto-Historian
Public Preacher
Red Ring Prostitute
Retrained Urban Hunter
Security Agent
Trafficker
Upper-Level Prostitute
Urban Terrorist

Semi-independent Professions

3D Reporter
Athleto-actor
Body Guard
Colonial Doctor
Colonial Engineer
Colonial Explorer
Colonial Officer
Colonial Soldier
Diplomat Spies
Exiled Nobel
Fallen Nobel
Galacto-Gladiator
Guild Merchant
Lock Charmer
Major World Ambassador
Mentrek
Mekanic
Mercenary
Neo-Troubadour
Nobel
Paleo-Archaeologist
Paleo-Priest
Pilot
Spy Terrorist
Star Chaser
Trafficker

Illegal Professions

Accursed Poet
Amok Rebel
Amorine Guardian
Defused Mentrek
Geologist-Pillager
Garbage Collector
Independent Mercenary
News-Terrorist/3DTV Pirate
Pirate
Psionic Initiate
Shabda-Oud Initiate
Smuggler
Trafficker

Pirates

Amourine Guardian
Defused Mentrek
Lock Charmer
Mekanic
Mercenary
O'lock (thief)
Paleo-Priest
Pilot
Private Secret Agent

Everyday Life

Daily life in the amazing, swarming universe of the Metabaron presents itself in many different shapes and forms. Indeed, life in an Endocity isn't remotely like the life one leads in the still-savage zones of a wild pioneer planet on the outer fringes. In a macrocosmic world that fully embraces all possible and conceivable realties from one end of the universe to another, and even to the further beyond, lifestyles can be nothing but extremely diverse. Even within a given category of worlds, such as the Maganat planets isolated in space, the blossoming of purely local customs and attachment to habitual protocol and conventions have given birth to a range of behaviors and customs unprecedented in their richness. Elsewhere, the unique prevailing conditions of a particular environment, combined with its imposed constraints, have fashioned quite specific lifestyle habits. Even within the thousands of Endocities scattered about the cosmos, where it might seem that a certain uniformity reigns, one is witness to the hatching of atypical customs and practices that have never been seen before.

As varied and rich as daily life may be, a certain number of general characteristics may be found everywhere throughout the Human Universe. The fact that the Human Universe is ruled by a single and unique power, that of the Emperoress Janus-Jana, helps to impart a certain appearance of homogeneity. The tutelary shadow of the Trans-Bourbon royal line literally formats the power games played out on all of the worlds in the universe.

Nevertheless, groups and factions of a certain weight also strive to leave their mark on as many worlds as possible. The representatives of the Techno-Techno Order and the merchants of the Ekonomat are present across every galaxy and, along with them, the people they control. As a result, even the residents of the most receded Colonial planets along with the inhabitants of the Endocities and the Maganats share the same language, consume the same products, and draw from the same reference source — the hypertele.

The Human Universe's unifying factors don't stop there. Indeed, all its inhabitants dispersed over billions of light years have at one time or another had the occasion to feel like they belong to the same community. For example, if a horde of galacto-barbarians, a troop of overly excited pirates, or a swarm of unfriendly alien ships comes sweeping through a system, immediately its population remembers that they are also subjects of an empire endowed with an effectively dissuasive defense system with a very powerful striking force. In this way, the Endoguard contributes to the collective memory as much as any ambassador, making everyone feel that they are part of the same whole. And in a bizarre way, the dark vessels and disquieting silhouettes of the Techno-Techno dignitaries, hidden behind their opaque glasses, produce the same effect. Their omnipresence reminds everyone everywhere that the universe is Janus-Jana's Empire.

Of course, the etiquette and protocol worries of some, political considerations of others, immediate material concerns for the greater part, and the shortsighted thinking of the large majority make one think that daily life here doesn't necessarily have anything remotely to do with daily life there. Still, the powerful range of common references which cement together this mosaic of Dantesque proportions that is the Human Universe, is never called into question. And this universe maintains a coherent, if not harmonious, whole in which every citizen of the Empire can find something with which he is familiar, even if he is lost in the lower levels of an Endocity or on a representative mission from a planet belonging to the Maganat or adrift in some progressive trading post on a pioneer planet.

Obviously there are nuances according to where one is — the innermost depths of Terra 1314, at Court on the Golden Planet, or mixing with the locals on a Colonial planet — or with whom one is rubbing shoulders — a condescending mono-duke from the Arch-Nobility, a wild plotter from the clan of some Kamar, or a passive chap zombified by the hypertele. All the same, there are a certain number of constants that can be found in almost all of the before-mentioned scenarios.

Diet and Nutrition

In every corner of the Human Universe, in space, on orbiting stations and absolutely every planet, its inhabitants must eat. But they don't all eat the same thing. Of all the domains susceptible to showing a certain uniformity, this one is, without a doubt, the most varied and diverse. One doesn't eat the same thing in the middle of an agrarian Maganat planet where paleo-agriculture is still practiced that one would in an Endocity or on the planets of an industrial Maganat.

Nevertheless, two great distinct tendencies stand out. In fact they represent the two extremes of the wide range of nutritional possibilities: paleo-biological nutrition on one side and synthetic on the other. On preserved worlds, where according to certain points of view an archeo-backwards type of culture is still practiced, one can eat a large range of culinary preparations made of fruit and vegetables, each one more exotic than the next. The richness of the local fauna enables the enhancement of everyday menus,

The Food Chain

In the Endocities, the upper-level ring is the first to be restocked with fresh food and produce. The leftovers from the upper levels are dispersed directly to the next level below and so on to the next until they reach the city-shafts. In the lowest regions of the shafts, even food preservatives arrive rotten, well past their use-by date.

with an increased number of choices. However, the degree of culinary refinement varies according to the milieu. A table of top dignitaries may be offered the most delightful and delicious-tasting dishes, while the common dish of the inferior casts is much more akin to a vile gruel than anything else.

In the Endocities, and on planets devoured by industry — the multi-progressive worlds as some say — the nutritional perspectives are less interesting. The supply of fresh products is inversely proportional to demographic size. And the populations are colossal. There are some hydroponic-produce farmers, particularly in the industrial ring of the Endocities, but the color and the taste of these crops are at best suspicious. In fact, the synthetic proteins produced by the pan-Techno factories make up the nutritional base. As they have no taste, they can be given absolutely any flavor, and their consistency can be modified to satisfy whatever one's heart desires. Of course with kublars, one can always import any exotic sweet at great expense.

How does a hyperrich far-future universe do a worse job feeding its lower orders than the worst twenty-first century first-world slum on Terra Prima? Sheer administrative indifference. No one at the top cares. No one at the bottom has any power to alter or avoid the monolithic system.

A La Carte

The nobles love eating endangered species. This cuisine is extremely trendy. As a result, hunters have only one thing in mind: exterminating animals as quickly as possible, imperiling the survival of the species and getting higher prices.

Armament

Where armament is concerned, one can procure just about anything that the creative imagination of the Techno-Techno researchers and the great industrial Maganat engi-neers are capable of inventing. And the list is long. Of course all of this is for a price. For those who have a sufficient budget at their disposal, there is no stopping them from equipping themselves like a space cruiser.

For the most common of hoodlums, there are standard knives, bats, and clubs, more or less improved with options such as the Vibrashock function. These trifles are available absolutely anywhere in the universe. On this subject it should be said that a great number of nobles — authentic and impostors alike — often parade around with one or several swords on their belts. For more serious or enterprising clients, there are other articles also available on the market. There is an entire range of firearms and defense pistols — Viper models among others — just the classic run-of-the-mill type stuff. More refined, but more expensive, the laser is always well appreciated by those in the know. Its versatility and efficiency make it a true wonder, seeing that it gets the better of all materials that are not equipped with calo-dispersive devices. However, the laser presents the inconvenience of being easily detected, giving rise to instant sanctions that are particularly dissuasive (that is, execution without warning).

For those who are truly ambitious, there is the last word in arms: OKO missiles, Remora bombs, heavy sonics, hand sonics for combat in atmosphere (supremely destructive, capable of annihilating every reinforcement as soon as the wave packets start resonating with any and all materials in their reach), plasma arms (effective in extra-atmospheric space, including hand guns, rifles, and heavy weaponry), and wonder of wonders — the multi-cogan which is compact, easy to use, and combines all of the principles of destruction (laser, plasma energy, multi-caliber projectiles, and grenades). With its hallucinating rate of fire, the cogan imparts to each man equipped with it, a striking force equal to that of a standard commando (50 men). Obviously, these little things are absolutely unavailable for official trade. Those who sell multi-cogans are generally at odds with the law and, not surprisingly, keep their prices high.

Despite their danger, arms and weapons in the Human Universe are omnipresent. There are several reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, on the Colonial and Maganat planets, the existence of local autonomous military forces justifies the presence of every type or kind of arm, and in large quantities. Secondly, a great number of Maganats are arms manufacturers for the Endoguard. Under the technical aegis of the Techno-Technos, they manufacture engines of war, of which an appreciable part disappears directly into parallel circuits. Thirdly, in the Endocities, authorities close their eyes as to the armament of anti-authority groups, such as the anarcho-psychotics, as it assures "bloody" animation without actually jeopardizing the political balance of power. Finally, everywhere in space, enormous quantities of diverse engines (drilling lasers, polymagnetic ballistics, and so on) and numerous explosive compounds can be diverted from their original usage to hyperdestructive ends.

Nonetheless, defensive weapons can be had. They just cost more, require better connections to get, are less available, and need better explanations when caught with them. Remember that virtually all good weapons are illegal. However, the written law is one thing. Enforcement is another. Who a person's connections are counts far more than the law.

Lastly, no section on armaments would be complete without mentioning several of the extremely lethal vectors (Biokill or Biocidex, hyperdrying

Profitability Calculations

In general, offensive weapons are favored to the detriment of defensive arms. A foot soldier costs less kublars than a protonic shield. Only the Empire and the Techno-Techno order have effective defense systems at their disposal. In this respect and in the greatest of secrecy, the Church of the Industrial Saints manufactures robo-killers and weapons of an unsurpassed sophistication.

bundles, and others). Capable of completely eradicating life in entire sectors of the cosmos, these weapons have been secretly obtained by larger factions such as the Endoguard, the Church of the Industrial Saints, and even the Ekonomat.

Decadence and Corruption

If there are two words that have taken on their full meaning during these last few hundreds of thousands of years, they would be the words "decadence" and "corruption." Humanity's expansion and development have certainly not progressed in the sense of expanding upon better qualities that are generally thought of as the finer side of human nature. Rather, there has been a reinforcement of the basest human qualities associated with man. The end result being that never have appetites for power been so sharpened, and never have those who have held a bit of power exercised it with such haughtiness towards the weak or with such determination to outright abuse this power.

Decadence is everywhere. It is highly visible despite the pomp and ceremony that comprises the highest parts of the Empire, particularly at Court and in the Emperoress's entourage where one vies with ingenuity in order to wallow in debauchery. Decadence stomps out even the smallest moralistic feeling as if it were a kitchen cockroach spreading itself out monstrously, consuming all worlds, and taking on a most particular dimension in the Endocities. Paradoxically, the chaste Techno-Technos, with their rigor and discipline, end up setting a good example in comparison. But once one is aware of their secret goals….

From time to time, grace and beauty show up in an individual. But the Necro-Dream is watching, and rapidly man's lowest instincts, brilliantly flattered, come out in full force, showing their strength. The systematic dissolution of the appreciation of effort, duty, and heightened aspirations translates into the disappearance of the sense of beauty and aesthetics among most beings, who thus take pleasure in a state of blind satisfaction. Today art is dead, and the only thing that counts is instantaneous satisfaction derived through pursuit of the lowliest of pleasures.

There is general corruption among all who are not already under the strict control of an anti-corruption machine. For bio-flesh is weak: it relents and becomes corrupt. And so if one is as vain as he is suicidal, by proposing kublars to an Endoguard in return for a favor, there is no stopping him from trying the same with a StellCom agent, a quarter-master serving a Maganat, or any other human — and weak — individual from the universe.

The Urban Hunt

Urban hunting is a popular leisure time activity in which numbers of Endocity inhabitants enjoy partaking. The principle is simple: human citizens, having obtained the appropriate permit, are authorized to eliminate, by every or any means possible, the underage mutants present outside of the mutant quarter, or those who do not respect the curfew. The hunters found violating the permit terms benefit from an extreme leniency. The success of the urban hunt is such that numerous planets have taken up the same idea, broadening it to include other individual categories such as deviants, pariahs, and the like.

Taboos and Restrictions

In a period where human life has lost all of its intrinsic value, murder is no longer really forbidden. Likewise, the disappearance of all collective morals lifted a great number of sanctions on prohibited acts that were once considered as taboo on Terra Prima. Debauchery, luxury, and even incest have been re-established — moreover, encouraged. The strongest law decrees these rights, and there is no longer an ethic to protect anyone or anything from excesses of all kinds.

However, what remains absolutely outlawed are attempts against the Imperial power and those who incarnate it. Maligning Janus-Jana's majestic person is tantamount to a death wish. If a type of rebellion is tolerated, for the needs of political show, it shouldn't in any way be exaggerated to the point of sacrilege. The Endoguard is vigilant, and even the smallest initiative is repressed. In the same way, in their own sphere of influence the most powerful factions are constantly on the lookout for the signs of respect they deem themselves due. Therefore, an omitted mark of respect to an inferior grade Techno-Techno delegate, or even to a petty noble from a lesser Nobility, can result in extreme consequences.

Leisure and Entertainment

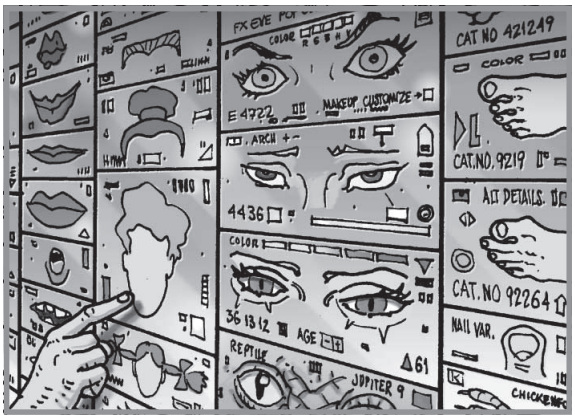
Where life is harsh, bitter, and austere, opportunities to amuse oneself are rare. In certain corners of the universe, a glass of whiskey is often the only available form of distraction. But these are extreme conditions. For as soon as human presence reaches a certain concentration, it is systematically accompanied by at least the minimum necessary and vital for amusement: the hypertele. Ah, the hypertele and its cohorts of perky presenters! It's good times for everyone: entire bottom spreading, flabby belly-growing days, with lobotomy eyes redder than hyperrubies staring straight ahead, mouths open wide, a bit of spit hanging from the lip, and of course a completely empty mind.

If it assures peace in the Endocities and all of the Empire's urban concentrations, it is considered entertainment and it isn't only provided by the hypertele. Death combats, ball-trap suicides, bets on the number of catastrophe victims, and mutant hunts all allow some fun and relaxation.

For the privileged in the upper levels and the rich nobles in their fief, there exist even more sophisticated types of leisure activities. Orgies are a grand classic as well as other debauchery sessions where one wolfs down incredible quantities of food, drink, and varied substances, pushing the territories of depravity and luxury to their extreme

limits. But there is also the hunt at court, with the tracking of serf and churls, and then most of all, there is war. The Empire tolerates small local conflict, as it helps contribute to openings in industry and even better, because it is extremely entertaining.

Finally at Court, one amuses oneself with refinement and cruelty. Some extensive galactic debacles are encouraged — much like the paleo-wars of religion — to help remind the universe where the real power lies. An infinite multitude of events are held where one can malign others, get drunk, show off, plot against, and even discretely poison another.



Drugs, Alcohol, and Hallucinogens

Or "Whiskey, SPV, and homeosluts"— the triptych of happiness in these lowliest of worlds. Under Janus-Jana's rule, conduct that would seem shocking to Terra Prima's paleo-habitants has since become established behavior, and even encouraged.

The regular and excessive consumption of alcohol is part of the social norm, just as is the taking of psychotropic drugs. There exist even "official" drugs, SPV and Cocaloco Dark, whose production and distribution are endorsed by the authorities, at least in the Endocities. These synthetic substances can be smoked, injected, or ingested through any natural orifice. Their effects are strong, but without any surprises. Oblivion can be obtained with a certain amount of relaxation. However, they don't allow one to reach new mystical heights or dimensions.

But the range of drugs does not stop there. One can find any number of other products that procure varied effects: calming, curative, sedative, stimulating, invigorating, hallucinogenic, or straight out mystical — psychotropic. Among the most popular substances, one must mention Guanaguacha, the favorite liquid drug of the pirates, or even Tranka, which has quite intriguing regenerative properties.

In any case, drugs aren't governed by law, and no one is prosecuted for having consumed drugs. But what may seem like a conquest of personal liberties, is in fact part of the general outline of a grander plot. The population, dulled and dumb-struck, is then that much more easily manipulated.

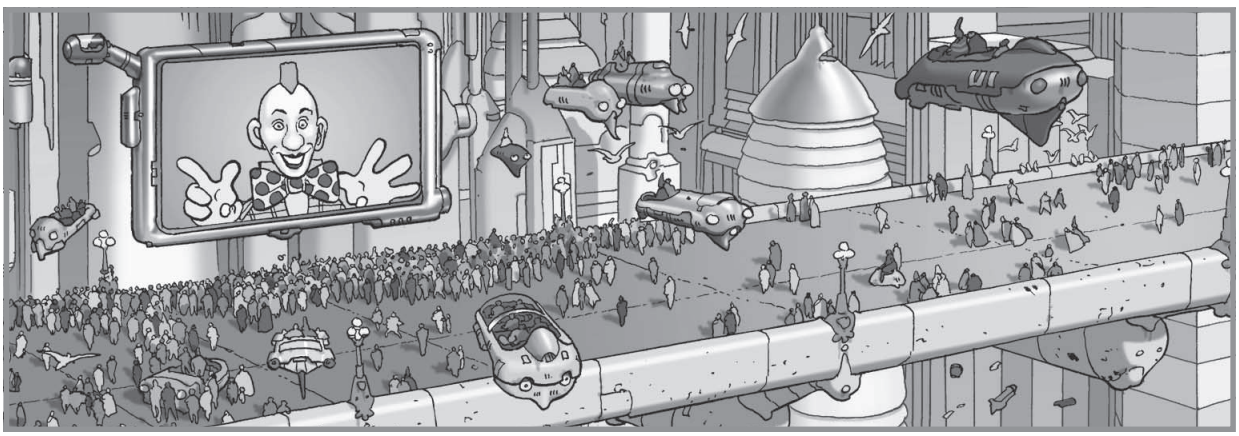
Thus with the Empire's consent, the Techno-Technos dump tons of their miracle molecules on entire populations who then voluntarily enter, glassy-eyed and grim-mouthed, into the Necro-Dream.

Homeosluts

Fruit of the Techno-Technos' creative genius, the homeosluts represent the height of hedonistic instruments. A veritable "a la carte" menu of choices, the homeoslut is interchangeable, according to the client's choice and mood of the moment. There exists an infinite number of possible combinations. This literal stock exchange of fantasies is able to respond to all desires, even the most ludicrous. The sole and only standard organ is the brain. All of the others are the choice of the consumer. Homeosluts are a sophisticated application, combining the most advanced teflo-genetic technology. The homeosluts offered are not exclusively female. Male models, mutants, animaloids, and aliens are equally available. The homeoslut market coexists with a classic human prostitution market.

Media

With a multigalactic communications network, the media is obviously omnipresent in the Human Universe. One really has to live at the outer edge of a desert on some abandoned planet in a blasted solar system to be isolated from the media's influence. However, the media's far-reaching breadth is not synonymous with diversity. Surely there exists an infinite number of channels and stations, but they all echo the Empire's official message, and even the entertainment programs proclaim the great glory of Janus-Jana. Moreover, beyond the media's submissiveness



to the Empire's power, it must not be forgotten that the media is an instrument of power for the Techno-Technos, caretakers of this powerful technology, and the means of propagation for their word. It is their vector of influence.

The People for Nobody show, which is broadcast nonstop on channel 3231, is the perfect example of the way in which they slowly diffuse their mortal poison — the Necro-Dream — into the minds of mil-lions of billions of the universe's inhabitants. At an epoque where one might believe that technology has finally freed humans from the bondage of their constraints, it seems that instead, it is used to weave other ones, more lethal than anyone has ever known.

However, all hope is not strictly lost, because even though it is rare, some fanatics endeavor to alert, inform, and warn. These devotees, having a line of conduct known as "Veritas" and whose order's motto is "the world has the right to know," work to track down the truth everywhere and alert the universe in the hope of awaking it. To this end, they have started up parallel communication networks and informative informal broadcasts. But their task not easy, and the road before them is mined with pitfalls and traps.

When History Falls Short…

Humanity's artistic heritage, consisting of paleo-works created over centuries of time, still exists but only as preserved through a medium that renders the reading and studying of this heritage tedious as well as futile. The rare students who are interested in these studies risk being drowned in a documentary hodgepodge that is excruciatingly boring, and more than often deteriorated, incomplete or falsified. This fact hardly encourages the new generations to turn towards their own cultural heritage.

Arts, Culture, and Sports

Art is dead. However, artistic pretension is more alive than ever, and there exists a flourishing market where colored heaps of different shapes, pompously baptized as "works of art," are exchanged for millions of kublars. In the Endocity's upper levels, the predominant trend is flash with works that make the worst of Terra Prima's "kitch" creations look like absolute marvels of paleo-modern art. If art is dead, then one can say that culture is at death's door. Intellectual works are only found interesting if they have practical applications. This is why the Mentreks are the only ones working in this domain, their intellectual talent tending towards the "mechanical."

This lack of "appreciation" for paleo-works has nothing to do with the high prices jaded collectors will pay to possess them. The "collector" may not have an esthetic clue as to what she is collecting. Collecting is a potlatch ceremony to prove wealth and status. Even illegally obtained works can add status by associating the "collector" with yet another pathway to the forbidden. At a high enough social level, law does not apply and even scandal can have its public relations value.

On the other hand, sports — which were the fascination of Terra Prima's inhabitants — have survived and even developed considerably. The sense of competition has become more intense, heightened to a point where the thousands of sports events organized each day inevitably result in almost as many violent deaths. But that's the harsh reality of sports competition and the price of success for the sports stations on the hypertele. The death rate of sportsmen and other athleo-actors is even greater due to the fact that the taking of any and all imaginable drugs is favorably looked upon. The show must go on….

Fashion Trends

In the clothing department, the choice available is as immense as the universe itself. Anything that the most intoxicated of paleo-designers on Terra Prima could have dreamed up one day under the influence of the hallucinogenic and stimulating effect of a Mexican shroom is nothing compared to what one finds in the Empire. Nevertheless, even in this richly colored swirling whirlwind, one can identify three clear and distinct tendencies.

First of all, giving honor to whom honor is due, there is the style of the high Nobility, which prevails at Court on the Golden Planet and among the most swanky of the Maganats. Inventive, even whimsical, it blends with relative success the finery of Terra Prima's Renaissance and the most innovative fibers, elements, and materials. All of the most harebrained, eccentric extremes have been attempted, but showing an error of taste is considered to be a supreme risk, because the most deceitful tongues will go out of their way to decry that which just yesterday everyone agreed was "all the rage."

Next, most common as well as being the ruling style on pioneer, warrior, and industrial planets; space exploration stations; merchant ships; and combat vessels, as well as anywhere men devote themselves to labor and surrender themselves to battle, is combat and work attire. Although practical, it screams and makes a commotion in the Endocities (with the exception of the industrial levels), on the Maganat planets, and it must be mentioned, on the Golden Planet.

Finally, more recognizable than any other style is the strict, almost psycho-rigid Techno-Techno uniform, which achieves a certain look, especially with their smoked glasses.

Commerce

On an intergalactic scale, trade is dominated by both the Imperial Merhcants Guild — a product of the Church of the Industrial Saints — and the merchants of the Ekonomat. It is they and they alone who deal with the import and export of raw materials as well as every rare product present on the planets of the universe.

However, locally, even if it is not explicitly encouraged by the authorities, private initiatives are not curbed. Private

enterprise must respect certain limits, though, and never reach the point of major expansion if it doesn't want to incur the striking severity and rigor of an omnipresent and finicky administration. Simply this means that one can nosh on a strange dish in a greasy spoon run by a friendly cook from Alderbaran V, have a drink in a seedy bar whose owner is being actively hunted down by militia from his native planet, or procure various items in a boutique or trading post managed by some adventuring voyager.

In the Endocities, the number of workshops is much more important than on other planets, but they are much more strictly controlled. On the Mag-anat and Colonial planets, a relatively important type of craft industry has blossomed. Those involved in the craft industry are not assured a galactic fortune, but they can attain a certain wealth. Great numbers of specialized sectors have been created, and depending upon local particularities, one can acquire the fruit of the efforts of these extremely skilled artisans and craftsmen, as well as the products and by-products of strange animals bred for their meat and fur.

Monetary System

The kublar is the official money of the Empire and is used as legal tender everywhere. Thus, even on the outer most isolated planets, at the edges of the barbarian confines, a purse full of kublars guarantees safe conduct and the buying power needed to acquire sustenance and subsistence. A huge network of banks and credit establishments, exclusive property of the Ekonomat, services all of the Universe. This powerfully secret and possibly occult group has their hands on all the cogs and gears of the Empire's finances, managing the Empire's assets, the Maganat and Colonial investments, and supervising all movements of capital throughout the Empire down to and including the smallest of galaxies. Every citizen of the Empire can open a bank account and have access to their money in any of the branch offices, but only the most fortunate are able to take advantage of this convenience.

For those who are more or less marginal, the services of the bank can end up being a double-edged sword. Certainly, one can avoid the inconvenience of having to travel with large sums of money — eliminating the risk of pirate attacks, enjoy the luxury of a secure form of payment — thanks to a system that re-cognizes the iris of the eye — and an easy way to ob-tain cash. But these banks become also the absolute enemy of discretion. The technical tools used for banking services are so powerful that one can be instantly tracked. For those who want to be forgotten, using a bank account adds up to about the same as handing oneself over to the authorities. In this scen-ario, one must find other elements of negotiation: minerals, gems, valuable information, etc.

Miscellaneous Expenses (in kublars)

Food

Raw lizard snack (25cl): 30
Polyvaren juice (25cl): 25
Geidig mermaid caviar (10g): 100
Bio-vita-steak (100g): 10
Elephantodonte milk (1L): 3

Drugs

Delicious Lupium (single dose): 5
Silo-amphets (single dose): 3
SPV (single dose): 5
Guanagouachka (1L): 10
Na-Nam (single dose): 6
D.S.T. (single dose): 4
M.J. Carnivore Oil (single dose): 7
Homemade whiskey (1L): 2
Mega-Antibio (10): 2

Black Market and Contraband

Everything can be bought, and everything is for sale. All things are manufactured, or can be made, and nature has generously created incredible quantities of living organisms — animal, vegetable, and mineral — from diverse resources. It is therefore almost bad will to have poorly stocked market stalls. Yes, but alas, commerce and trade represent an instrument of power, a potent lever used to amass fortunes and control the masses. This is why official commerce is either in the hands of the Imperial Merchants Guild, originating from the Church of the Industrial Saints, or with the Ekonomat's tradesmen.

Where there is money to be made, people have always known how to best use their imaginations. Consequently, parallel markets are booming. These illegal markets are not without risk for the seller and the buyer, because product quality is not guaranteed, and there is no after-sales customer service.

Used as a propagation vector for the Necro-Dream in the Endocities, the illegal commerce of drugs, weapons, and other instruments of pleasure is conducted with the quasi-benediction of the authorities. However, in space, the same leniency does not exist. Furthermore, pirates and smugglers are heavily armed, and skirmishes with the StellCom patrols, local armies, or worse the Endoguard, are extremely violent. On the Maganat planets, everything depends upon the local lord's mood, and although certain traffickers get off lightly, others may be flayed to death.

Medicine and Healthcare

More than 30,000 years after the paleo-prophet and as during every period of life on Terra Prima, health is considered a treasured possession that must be preserved. Under the reign of Janus-Jana, never have humans had at their disposal so many possibilities to overcome physical pain and injury of every type and nature. But it should be said that there have never been so many opportunities to hurt oneself. The most adventurous are always at the mercy of a mutant virus or a new unknown germ. The most hot-headed people risk at every moment the possibility of being burned, perforated, cut, mutilated, or simply disemboweled. But even the most tranquil homebodies are not com-

pletely safe, because the condhomes can be mistaken as targets, the abuse of SPV mixed with cocaloco can burn out neurons, and homeosluts may be infected with psycho-emotional parasites that transform them into killing organisms known as "killersluts."

So what to do if one is sick or injured? Once again, everything depends upon the means one has at their disposal. If one only has a handful of kublars, better go buy a whiskey and some SPV. But if money is no object, the health services robo-surgeons from each Endocity's white ring or from Hospital planet can certainly make miracles happen. Nevertheless, with their creed being "better to cut than to heal," it might be more prudent to obtain some medicine and contact a defused Mentrek normally unauthorized to practice medicine, or consult paleomystic people with pythotherapeutic knowledge on some faraway planet.

Mortality

The mortality rate isn't fluctuating, nor is it variable or balanced. It is simply elevated. In fact, that's about the least that can be said. In a period where one can live several hundred standard years, where science allows the regeneration of organisms, surgery replaces faulty organs, and medicines allow one to ignore attacks on the body by bacterial disease, well despite all, people die a lot. In fact, when dawn arrives, the chances of seeing the twilight aren't that great. And according to where or whom one is, the chances may even be null.

There are several causes to explain this phenomenon. First of all, there exist methods and secrets for an increased and even grand longevity, but the price is prohibitive, rendering these secrets completely inaccessible to the common mortal. In addition, life is not highly valued. The Nobility draws cheerfully from the population as a source of slave labor or simply for their own amusement. There are also the epidemics, experiments, wars, and commerce. So many mortal activities. Finally, in this somber universe where depression is omnipresent, suicide has become a manner of expressing oneself — a new art form.

Wages, Winnings, and Fines
(in kublars)

Wages and Winnings

- *Average salary = 30K/day*
- *Denouncement Award = 50K + SPV (10 doses)*
- *Winning bet on death rate = 5 X the bet*
- *Winning bet on number of destroyed organs = 3 X the bet*
- *Winning bet on number of destroyed limbs = 2 X the bet*

Fines

- *Accidental murder = 300K*
- *Accidental killing of an official = Death or "remodeling" (lobotomy)*
- *Theft = Death or remodeling*
- *Failed suicide = 200K*
- *Circulating in a nonauthorized zone = Death or remodeling*

Communications

Communicating in this cyclopean universe is not simple. Nevertheless, thanks to the mastery of the extreme bands of the polyhyperfrequencies (a Techno-Techno discovery that immediately resulted in thousands of interested parties), all of the inhabited worlds live in a quasi-synchronized manner. Technically, all of the information emitted into space is sequenced into sets of multicryptic logic, able to sweep through Techno-Techno Tunnels without support materials, then diffused on to the four corners of the Human Universe through the use of hyperfast relays (HFR). Thus, the hypertele programs can be seen simultaneously by millions of billions of spectators at millions of light years of distance. Of course, certain channels are strictly reserved for official communications (Endoguard and Stell-Com), and the wealthiest of Maganats have bought frequencies, which are reserved for their exclusive use.

On a more local scale, on a single planet or within the same star system, the use of standard frequencies is free. New installation techniques and broadcasting reception devices provide for the high quality of communications. On the best-equipped worlds, technical excellence is such that one can carry on a conversation with a holographic representation of the person one is calling just as if they were physically present. However, on some of the most rustic Colonial or pioneer planets, one just uses a video communications terminal, popularly called a "vid-comm."

The Endocities are teeming with the last word in terminals, especially in the upper levels. Down in the guts of the Endocities, finding a public vid-comm that works takes a certain initiative. Of course the majority of inhabitants have a personal mobile communications terminal, called a "perscomm" or a "hand vid-comm," but confidentiality is not guaranteed with these machines. Furthermore, there is not a single electronic jammer that is 100% safe. The best way to assure privacy and discretion is to speak using hints and allusions, or use a harmless secret code that no machine can decrypt.

At the supreme level of communications, the Techno-Technos have perfected a gigantic universal network, absolutely invisible and undetectable, that allows them instantaneous communication throughout any number of galaxies, by acting directly on the universe's memory.

Official Bodies of the Empire

For that which is visible, the Empire's authority is represented by the StellCom and the Endoguard. The agents of the former advocate, regulate, supervise, and enforce. The agents of the latter do not discuss. They beat up, knock out, and strike in a much more definitive matter. The StellCom offices are found on all of the planets in the Empire, on orbiting stations, at the entrances of the Techno tunnels, and in the Endocities. On the other hand, the Endoguard

doesn't maintain official administrative offices. But they are present. Their cruisers cut across space and are never far from any point susceptible to becoming a hot spot.

On the Maganat and Colonial planets, one finds a panoply of diverse and varied administrations. The Maganats have a classic social structure, with a military force that handles extensive police missions, an administration whose vocation is essentially fiscal, and whose services (education, health, and others) are limited to the bare minimum. On the Colonial planets, the range is much richer. In fact, it seems like on a daily basis they invent new commissions, committees, high command police stations, delegations, and other administrative organs. With their imaginations let loose, they are almost impossible to stop.

No matter where you go, each population is confronted by a heavy, complex, and castrating administration. The smallest initiative is immediately exposed to difficulty: "Of course you can leave the Endocity, but have you filled out form 27B dash 6?"

Religion

Aside from the Emperoress who is surrounded by a shroud of mystery, nobody nor nothing in the Empire really incarnates the hallowed and sacred, with the exception of the Saint Kublar, who is revered by all. Despite its name, even the Church of the Industrial Saints has nothing to do with what was at another time conventional to call religion. Of course, the Techno-Technos cultivate a form of ceremony, and a taste for rites and ritual, which has certain similarities to a cult. But what has disappeared is the spiritual dimension. Today, only appearances remain.

In its own way, the Shabda-Oud order, in its surviving reformed version, is one of the rare examples of a congregation joined together around a faith, who give homage to a being dressed in the finery of a divinity. In the rest of the universe, and especially as we get further and further from the center of Imperial power, it is not rare, however, to come across all sorts of individuals who profess a belief in a creature or a principle. Their dogmas are more or less supported by fact, and certainly end up convincing a good number of enthusiasts over to their cause. To this day, none of these religious beliefs have turned into a crusade, but the possibility is not completely ruled out, and one should be ready for anything.

Cults, Rites, and Beliefs

On a universal scale, the ultimate creed by which all plots are motivated, and hope is represented, is the myth of the Perfect Androgyne. Since the beginning of time, long before Terra Prima became nothing but an obscure thought in the collective memory, humanity was already placing its hopes in the coming of a being who associates the virtues of the male principle with that of the female principle. Today, if the certitude of an imminent golden age has faded away, the mystique of the Hermaphrodite has been conserved with force.

But it has been transformed over time, and the Hermaphrodite is now only one source of power and legitimacy. Didn't the Shabda-Oud dream of bringing to this world a double being able to dominate the universe? And other powers also work in the shadows toward this being's coming. For its part, the pan-Techno Church, lacking any veritable faith, practices an extremely ritualized form of worship. Their order is hyperhierarchical, and the life of its followers is structured around numerous ceremonies and obligations.

But the universe is vast, and there exist many of other types of beliefs and rites. On the most far-off worlds, to help bear life's torments or simply satisfy the inherent mystical thirst in the heart of humans, populations willingly develop an abundance of beliefs, religions, and rites.

The Neuro-Emotional Cult

In the Endocities, every attempt at spiritual elevation is immediately corrupted. Religion only offers a facade, lacking all depth. However, a hidden religion survives in secret, particularly in the heart of the lower casts and the outcast populations: the Neuro-Emotional Cult. This totally outdated faith is founded upon a paleo-feeling practically forgotten today: love.

The Necro-Dream

One of the most demeaning and degrading forces of the Universe, the Necro-Dream plunges those who are subjected to its effect into a stupefying state of total exhaustion. The Necro-Dream is propagated through the hypertele, drugs, manipulation, and oppression. Its ultimate goal is to quell free-thinking, reducing ideals to nothingness and eliminating hope and love in the wake of its intoxicating influence.

The Necro-Dream is present throughout all of the Empire, found in the Endocities as well as the Maganat and Colonial planets. Even the Golden Planet is not spared, because it finds, in the heart of those who reside there, a place where it can take on its full meaning and dimension.

As soon as one enters into its sphere of activity, the moment that one falls into its web, all the most fundamental principles upon which rest one's deepest convictions start to waiver. The slow chipping away, the undermining of the spirit has begun. The strongest of resolutions blow away like dust in the wind. If exposure lingers on, and if one doesn't fight at each and every moment against its insidious and persistent action, free will dwindles and disappears. One may end up hazy-eyed and forever riveted before an empty screen. Life will vanish, and one can become nothing more than a creature of darkness.

Housing

In a universe where incredible quantities of varied worlds exist together, housing comes in all shapes and forms just like the bio-beings and others that live there. From teflo-fiber tents and other light structures used by prospec-

Price of Housing
(in kublars per day)

Endocity Location	*Pre-owned*	*Standard*	*Deluxe*
Gold Ring (condhome)	*1700*	*2500*	*5000*
White Ring	*–*	*–*	*–*
Silver Ring (condhome)	*170*	*250*	*500*
Blue Ring (condhome)	*35*	*50*	*100*
Green Ring (condhome)	*5*	*10*	*25*
Red Ring (condhome)	*Variable*	*Variable*	*Variable*
Primal Ring	*–*	*–*	*–*
Sub Ring (condhome)	*2*	*3*	*4*
Black Ring (condhome)	*0.5–100*	*1–100*	*2–100*
Located On	***Pre-owned***	***Standard***	***Deluxe***
Private Asteroid	*Variable*	*Variable*	*Variable*
Class A Astrhotel	*10000*	*25000*	*50000*
Class B Astrhotel	*100*	*250*	*500*
Class C Astrhotel	*10*	*25*	*50*
Class A Planet	*300–1000*	*700–2500*	*1500–5000*
Class B Planet	*20–100*	*40–250*	*100–500*
Class C Planet	*2–10*	*3–25*	*5–50*
Class A Paradise–Planet	*1800*	*2500*	*5000*
Class B Paradise–Planet	*180*	*250*	*500*
Class C Paradise–Planet	*35*	*50*	*100*
Private Orbital Station	*Variable*	*Variable*	*Variable*
Civilian Orbital Station	*300–1000*	*700–2500*	*1500–5000*

tors on the pioneer planets, to the rich Maganat's palace overflowing with gold and marble from Marmola, passing by the rustic, dilapidated houses of the supporters of life in the open air on certain archeo-backward planets, or the minuscule condhome apartments, jam-packed with flashy appliances set in teflormica furniture, the variety is vast. And we haven't even mentioned the rarest habitations, such as the jade termite nest that forms the palace of the Kama-Ming family, or the cave dwellers' constructions, where hordes of inferior humanoid creatures from certain worlds are packed in.

That said, one thing is sure, everywhere that the law of the Emperoress rules, the quality of the housing depends upon the quantity of kublars one can devote to that end. In an Endocity, four or five kublars will allow you to spend the night in a slum shelter. Yet if one is willing to spend 10,000 kublars, the doors swing grandly open to the fantastic suites of the upper levels, provided with all of the newest technological conveniences combined with a touch of refinement.

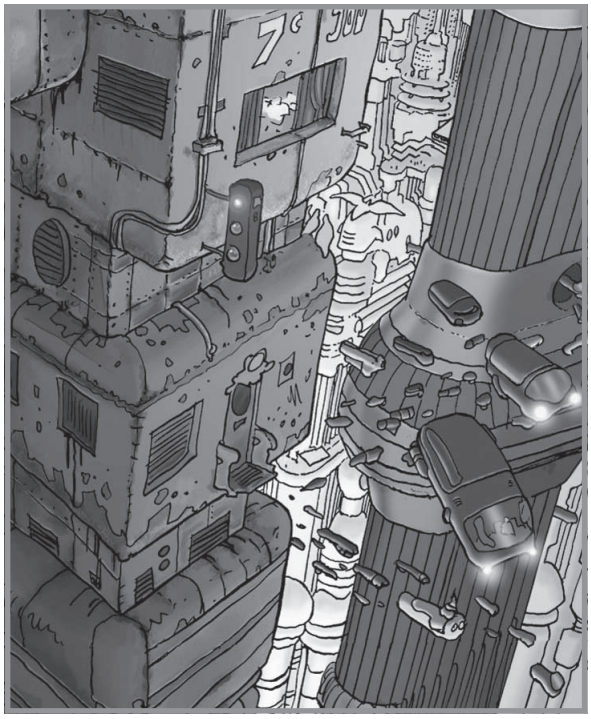
Technological Standards

Close to 30,000 years after the accession of the Trans-Bourbon line, technology has arisen to a level that even Terra Prima's most prolific authors never dared dream. For the universe in general, technology has already reached its apex and has now entered into a phase of decline. The Techno-Technos have access to an inexhaustible source of technical wonders thanks to their alliance with the force of darkness — "The Tenebrae," which grants them a dominating place in the heart of the Empire. These wonders remain perfectly inaccessible to everyone else, even if one is in daily contact with their miraculous machines and inventions. But if technological opulence expresses itself for a supra-prince of the Archi-Nobility with a profusion of attentive mechanical servants, then for the average fellow, it translates into a multitude of unhappy encounters with robo-cops, robo-firemen units, and other automated devices of repression and coercion.

Transportation

Admittedly, the Empire is vast. But the existing means of transportation allow one to go absolutely anywhere in the universe. There are three major categories of crafts: extra-atmospheric vessels for traveling in space, ground crafts, and a combined air-ground ship. Each one comprises a large range of engines.

As the name indicates, the extra-atmospheric vessels never penetrate into a planet's atmosphere. Their size ranges from gigantic to colossal, from some hundreds of meters to several kilometers. Upon reaching a celestial body's outskirts, they return into orbit. Separate landing ships take over from this point. Looking at their propulsion capabilities, they are equipped with motors capable of reaching



supraluminous light speed for passage through hyperspace.

On the ground and in atmospheric space, one uses crafts usually designed for ground travel. Thanks to epyphite, which erases the effects of gravity, these ships travel in a state of levitation at a few centimeters, a few meters, or even a few hundred meters from the ground. The physical constraints of the atmosphere limit cruising speed, even with epyphite absorbing hundreds of g's of acceleration. Due to the friction of the air against the fuselage and the pressure exerted upon the structure, movement in atmosphere cannot exceed the speed of Mach 5.

Cost of Services
(in kublars)

	Quality			
Type	*Low*	*Standard*	*Deluxe*	*Black Market*
Light vessel hangar (by day)	7	20	50	5–100
Medium vessel hangar (by day)	15	35	150	10–300
Heavy vessel hanger (by day)	25	50	500	20–1000
Homeoslut	15	19	25	–
Hospitalization	10	20	150	5–100
Hospitalization with surgery	20	35	250	10–200
Light vessel servicing/repair	30	50	200	25–150
Medium vessel servicing/repair	60	100	500	50–300
Heavy vessel servicing/repair	150	250	1000	120–800
Interstellar Tunnel passage	–	200	–	–
Intergalactic Tunnel passage	–	500	–	–

Combined vessels are based on the mixing of two principles. Most private vessels fall into this category. Being a much smaller size than the standard extra-atmospheric vessels, the interior layout and comfort of these ships are often compromised to compensate for pure performance, even if the most exclusive models display completely staggering properties.

Owning a private vessel is not within the reach of everyone's pocketbook — indeed far from it. In fact, only the most superior levels of the population can afford this luxury, but numerous organizations have the means to arm the vessels. The average citizen takes the regular public lines that cut across the cosmos for his transportation needs. Provisions and service are once again hierarchical on this type of transportation. One can find at least six different classes: metaluxury, luxury, infraluxury, standard, economy, and basic. Of course, the price a traveler pays at each level depends on the quality of the ship, the quality of the crew, the length of the voyage, and the destination. Voyaging on a luxury cruise ship could cost 8,000 kublars or more, while splitting a room on a freighter would go for 80 kublars or less.

ENDOCITIES

Throughout the universe, thousands of planets have been seized and kneaded as if they were balls of clay, then smashed, torn apart in little pieces, and reshaped to be given over to the numberless hordes of humans. The bios are incessantly multiplying, and more space must constantly be found to cram them in. In its compelling march towards endless expansion, the human race imposes no limits upon itself. Thanks to the Techno-Technos' power and know-how, even the smallest arid sphere having an acidic atmosphere can be rendered suitable for habitation.

When a celestial body, asteroid, or planet with the potential for structural terra-transformation is spotted in space, a monolithic laboratory-factory ship from the Magnarmarda Techno-Amazonas fleet sets itself in orbit around the chosen body. Slowly, the ship casts its enormous shadow over the planet's surface, making the planet seem suddenly tiny in comparison. The colossal vessel suspended in the void resembles a ferocious predator extremely amused to see the fear rising in the heart of its prey.

THE MAGNARMADA

Before long, a fleet of sondes, needle rocket penetrators, and other draining fluid collectors commence their strange ballet. If the planet's vital presence isn't considered threatening enough to justify an intervention by the Endoguard, entire colonies of multispecialized robotic entities are called upon to storm the planet and stifle the smallest sign of protest or objection. This silent and efficient arm of the Church of the Industrial Saints shamelessly attacks, with precision and meticulousness, the planet's air and water, then its flora and animals, much like a patient spider nibbling away little by little at its prize, neglecting not even the smallest remnants of life. The land and underground are scoured, analyzed, turned over, and ultimately cannibalized.

But the operation has only just begun. When the spy systems have collected samples, analyzed the data, and specified a procedure, the Techno-Techno vessel opens up its metallic arms wide around the planet, gently closing in and tightening its grasp. With its delicate and light touch, this first contact produces a long, cold shudder across the surface of the planet. Next the vessel retightens its grip, asserting its force, and prepares itself to offer the kiss of death. A heavy trephine then shoots out of the ship's bay, striking the planet's flesh. It bores into the earth, thrusting always to greater and greater depths, shamelessly raping the soil until it reaches the deepest and most innermost parts of its making. Slowly but surely, the planet is gutted of its substance, held against its will, offended, and bled dry, like an immaculate sanctuary desecrated by a horde of industrial barbarians.

In a fraction of time that would be infinitesimal on the universal scale, the Techno-Techno Magnarmada transforms a planet or system unsuitable for human life into an otherwise welcoming world, or at least one that is viable for humans. Often, these monolithic, dark vessels will completely upset blue planets as well, producing an aseptic sphere covered with smooth teflon-concrete and encircled by a purified atmosphere free from all particles, every type of bacteria and even the smallest micro-organism, as well as the most miniscule trace of a mycelium spore. With all native life eliminated, a brand new Endocity is made ready to welcome billions of occupants. Humanity is nothing more than a remote souvenir.

The Magnarmada

The Techno-Amazonas is an immense fleet of laboratory-factories whose flagships are named Vesuvio, Tsunami, Anaconda, Hindenburg, Modra, Gorgo, Godzilla, Piranhas, Orca, Tornado, Tyson, Goliath, Leviathan, King Kong, and Titanic. Indirect homage to humanity's hegemonic tendencies, these patronymics are an example of the Church of the Industrial Saint's general lack of tact. The Church lives by one rule only — the survival of the fittest — and it takes on any obstacle with the tranquil serenity of a galactic steamroller.

TOPOGRAPHY AND ORGANIZATION

Conceived in the Techno-urbanists prolific electronic brain, the Endocities respond to two demands: the Empire's need to lodge a population that is continually in exponential growth, and the Church of the Industrial Saint's desire to format life according to its scientific vision. Upon the request of the universe's first human Emperor Rosemonde I the Rebis, the Endocity project was started and entrusted to the Guild, which later became the order of the Techno-Technos. During this distant time period, terra-transformation work took dozens of standard years. Terra 0001, the pilot project, mobilized a technoid army for the precise period of 37 years. Although long in the making, the result did not disappointment their high expectations. More than 15 billion inhabitants were housed, spread out vertically over nine rings within the structure. Since this time, construction techniques have been vastly improved and accelerated, but the framework has remained the same. Nothing resembles an Endocity more than another Endocity, but even though they are based on the same structure, no Endocity is a strict replica of another.

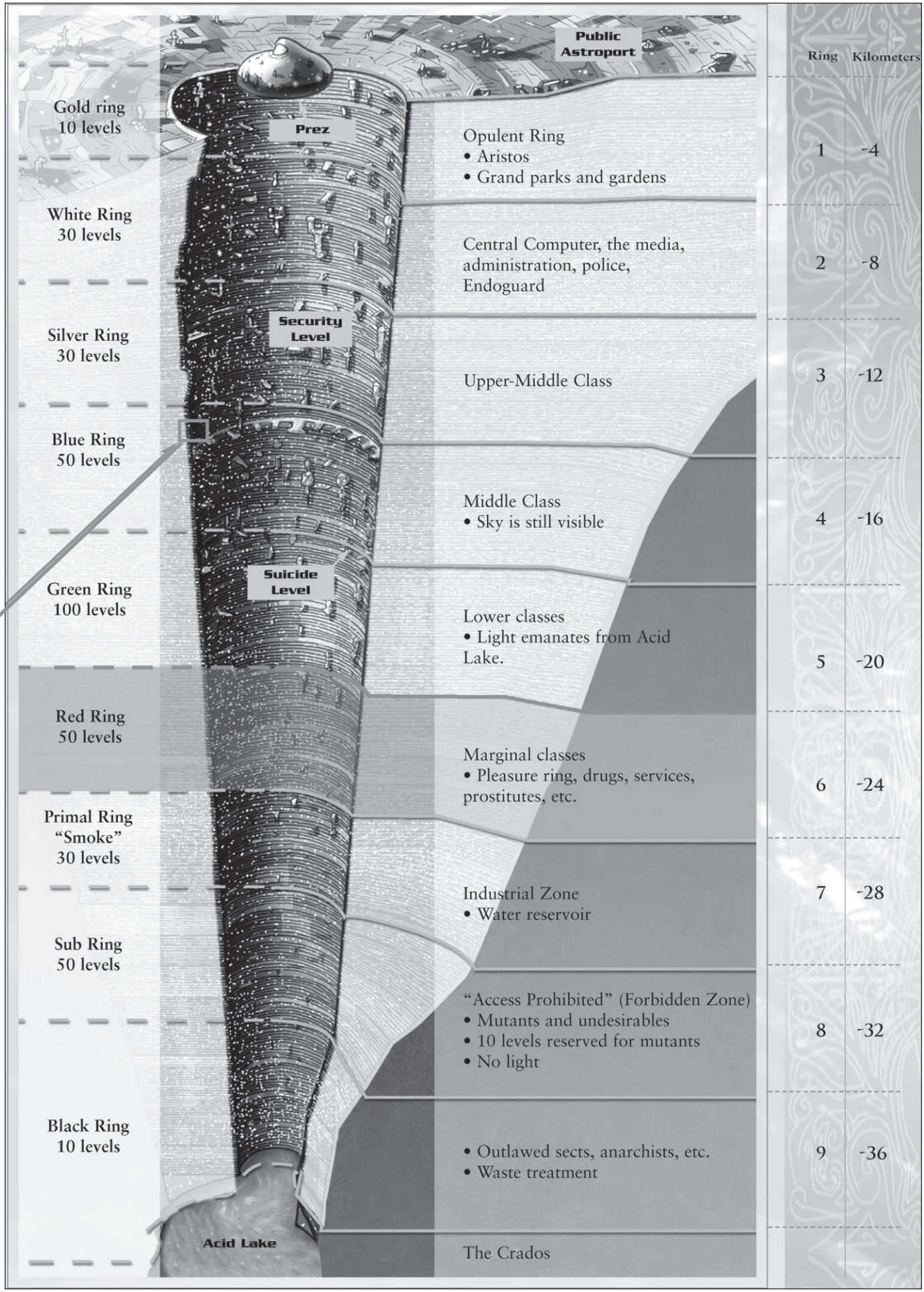
Physically, an Endocity is an enormous crater dug into the earth of a planet. On the surface, the entirety of the topmost layer is completely leveled and sterilized. The total bio-presence, which just recently may have been romping in the sun, is annihilated. The fauna is decimated, the flora eradicated, the geographical relief razed, and any intelligent race is either eliminated or as-

similated according to their degree of humanity. The Techno-Technos leave nothing but an immense, smooth and bare teflo-concrete expanse in place of what nature deemed appropriate for the environment. Seas, oceans, and other water masses exist only in memory, much as hills, mountains, and any other elevated terrain. After the machines have passed over, the sole prominence is the Techno-Techno city, a colossal construction that is placed well away from the Endocity entrance, and is called "The Mushroom" by the population. Closer to the entry, at precisely 50 kilometers, one finds the astroport installations. This complex port occupies approximately 1,000 acres. Apart from the freight zones, its installations consist of maintenance and repair services for descent vessels (those capable of ground landings), StellCom administrative buildings, and a transit zone supplied with boutiques full of overpriced products. As a whole, most of the facilities have control and surveillance functions. An underground anti-g transport system links the astroport to the Endocity proper.

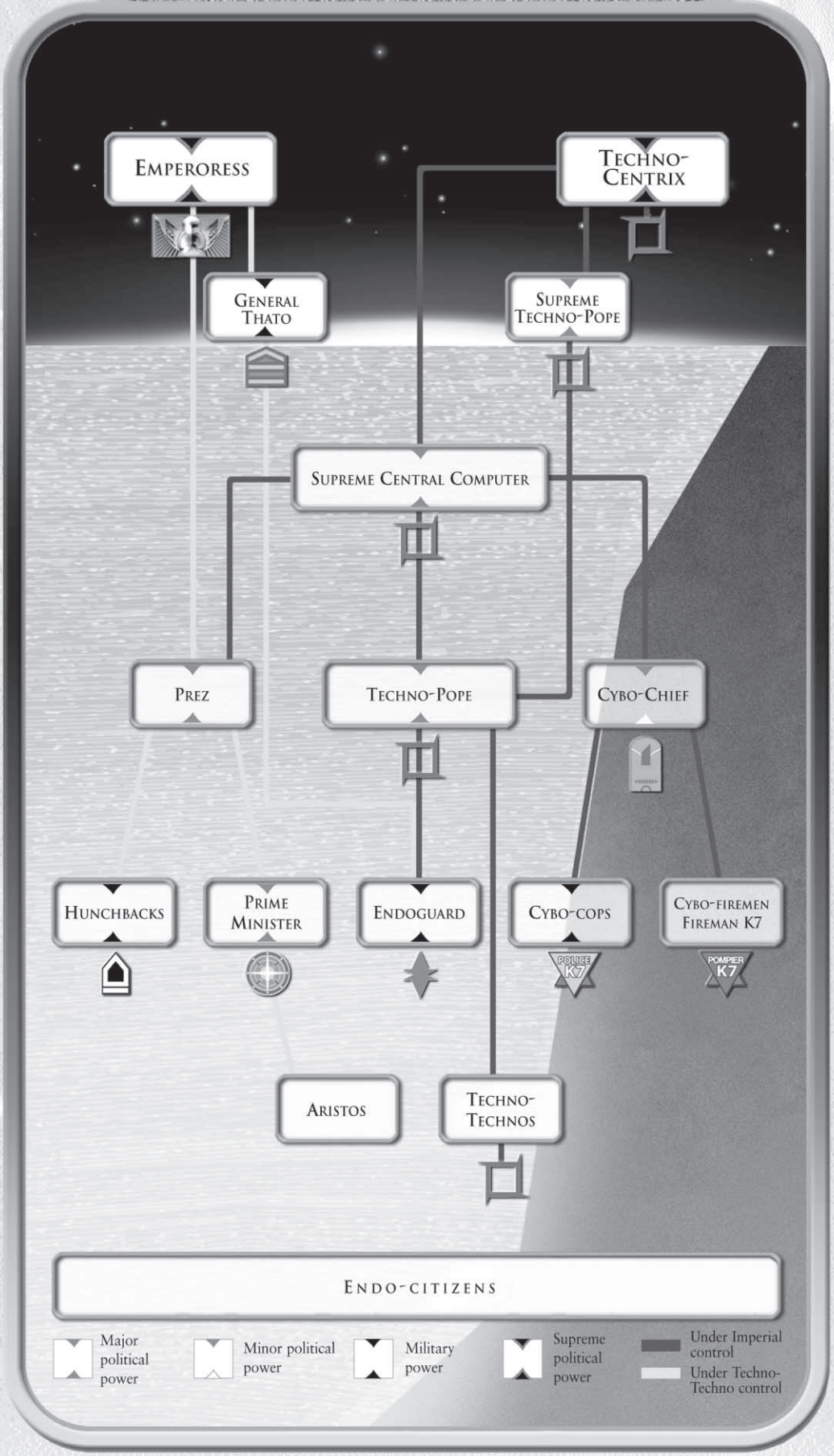
The Prez's Palace

The city-shaft's access crater is an opening of some seven kilometers in diameter, but its circumference is irregular in shape. Above the entrance floats an immense vessel in stationary flight. This is the vessel of the Prez, where the supreme authority of the Endocity lives, and the directing branches reside. There are also apartments reserved for the Techno-Pope (who normally lodges in the Techno-City), the Prime Minister (who also has the most luxurious residence in the Golden Ring), as well as a swarm of Aristos from the Golden Ring, who come on vacation to take part in the magnificent parties that the Prez continuously hosts. Here life goes by in an uninterrupted series of wild times surpassing even the decadence of the archeo-human paleo-ritual known as "spring break." During these endless indulgences, the Aristos' curious and whimsical spirit shows itself in its full creative force. The Prez's vessel also contains immense gardens and parks, where artificial deer frolic about and synthetic ibis, pink flamingos, and herons fly in the imitation sky.

Moving on to other areas of the Prez's vessel, one finds a hypersophisticated communications room, directly linked to Golden Planet services. It is called the "Hypertransmitter Room." On the same level of the ship, there is another interesting particularity: the "Cloning Area" (or Clone Zone) where the Prez comes to transplant his jaunty soul into a new receiving body at regular intervals. Finally, all of the Hunchbacks — the guards closest to the Prez, known for being both efficient and unsightly — live aboard the vessel as well. Under the vessel's potbelly is the conical shaft, which plunges 36 kilometers down into the planet's guts. The Prez's ship, which conforms perfectly to the shape of the shaft's


Public Astroport
Prez
Security Level
Suicide Level
Acid Lake
Gold ring 10 levels
White Ring 30 levels
Silver Ring 30 levels
Blue Ring 50 levels
Green Ring 100 levels
Red Ring 50 levels
Primal Ring "Smoke" 30 levels
Sub Ring 50 levels
Black Ring 10 levels
Opulent Ring
• Aristos
• Grand parks and gardens
Central Computer, the media, administration, police, Endoguard
Upper-Middle Class
Middle Class
• Sky is still visible
Lower classes
• Light emanates from Acid Lake.
Marginal classes
• Pleasure ring, drugs, services, prostitutes, etc.
Industrial Zone
• Water reservoir
"Access Prohibited" (Forbidden Zone)
• Mutants and undesirables
• 10 levels reserved for mutants
• No light
• Outlawed sects, anarchists, etc.
• Waste treatment
The Crados
Ring
Kilometers
1 -4
2 -8
3 -12
4 -16
5 -20
6 -24
7 -28
8 -32
9 -36

Endocity Organization



opening, is capable of completely blocking the Endocity's only access. In case of a slightly violent uproar, or utter rioting, cutting off the entrance is the perfect way of restoring calm to the lower levels.

The Hunchbacks

The Prez's private guards, the Hunchback Brigade, is made up of free men, taken at random from the streets of the Endocity and from death row, where they chose a "complete remodeling" as opposed to a basic execution, as allowed by penitentiary administration decree 36FX K6. The remodeling process, which takes 24 standard hours to complete, turns the convicts into creatures entirely devoted to the Prez by the implantation of a complex Techno-Tehnos device, hidden by the hump on their backs. Evidently, during the course of the operation, they lose their memories and their individual identities, but they gain in return a superior force — the technological mechanism is comprised of an integrated exoskeleton — and a well tested cynicism. Devoid of all human sentiment, the Hunchbacks execute the most lowly work of the Prez with relish and sadism. Mutants are their preferred victims. Housed in the Prez's palace, they have unlimited access to all of the Endocity. Enslaved to the Prez, they also obey the Aristos of the Gold Ring. It is moreover not uncommon to see them serve as bodyguards for a group of Aristos on an outing to experience the debauchery of the Red Ring.

Typical Hunchback

This generic character can be used with the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*.

Agility 5D: brawling 7D, firearms 8D, melee combat 6D, running 6D. Knowledge 1D: intimidation 6D. Mechanical 3D. Perception 3D. Strength 5D: lift 6D. Technical 1D. Psionics 0D. Move 10. Character Points 3. Equipment: Techno-implants (+1D STR to resist damage, torso only), Disintegrator 48 (12D damage), suprapistol (5D damage), shock-knife (STR+1D+2 damage), uniform. Note: Memories are retained for 24 hours after remodeling. After that, the Hunchback's greatest desire is to kill, which he does on command or if what he's guarding appears to be in danger.

The Nine Rings

The government's urban-planning program keeps the Endocity's register up to date. Although this is relatively easy in the upper rings, the task gets more difficult the further down the rings you go and becomes quite complicated below the primal ring. The underground cave dwellers are not counted and the galleries they dig are simply ignored. Although the Techno-Technos could easily keep accurate records of human and mutant activities in the Endocity, they can't be bothered. It doesn't serve their master plan.

> ***The Golden Ring***
>
> *"Reality is simply reality. I wear a halo, and you do not! Social barriers cannot be erased… If you want to live with me, eat and sleep with me, make love to me every night, you must become my dog." —Louz de Garra, an Aristo in love.*

1 • The Gold Ring

Immediately beneath the glossy surface of the smooth, leveled, and polished planet is the Golden Ring, the inaccessible dream of the lower-level populations. Consisting of ten levels spread vertically over four kilometers in height, the Golden Ring is a marvel of modern architecture and technology. The latest in ultra-postmodern amenities and comforts are assembled together in a profusion of refined living areas. Each building is set with carpets of artificial greenery, which flower regularly with all of nature's beauty, minus the work and the inconvenience. Animals have immaculate coats, are discreetly perfumed, and no longer need to be walked or use a litter box. The Aristos live in apartments that range from extroverted opulence dripping with gilt, for the most simple, to an archeo-Las Vegas-like decorative madness, where replicas of Greek temples cohabit with reproductions of the Terra Prima pyramids or the Taj Mahal. The most technically accomplished of all the rings, the Golden Ring is also the smallest in size. Of course, it is reserved for the exclusive use of a few privileged and handpicked individuals, so elite that there is an overall impression of great space, despite the relatively small dimensions of the ring. Everything is vast, airy, clear, and harmonious. Here, the Church of the Industrial Saints' technological contribution is enormous but practically invisible. All of their devices are kept behind the scenes, and, as in the Emerald City in the land Oz, only the lavish beauty of gold and platinum is visible to the naked eye.

Environment and Residents

In an environment where luxury vies with munificence and the grandiose with the sublime, where technological tools galore put life's ups and downs out of mind, tens of thousands of Aristos, served by armies of robo-servants, rule and oppress the lives of billions of individuals with their supreme contempt. Disdain is second nature to the Aristos, who have given up their Infra-Nobility status and access (however limited) to the Golden Planet to be at the top of a something, however unpleasant the bottom is. That disdain underlies everything they do, from their torrid orgies in the Red Ring — not without hefty bodyguards — to their relationships with their fellow Aristos. Desire is their driving force, lust their fuel, and concupiscence their highway. Despite everything around them urging them to be nonchalant and live the good life, they constantly feel disgraced by their imprisonment in an Endocity far from the Golden Planet and the real centers of power. They may be the rulers of a small world, but their kingdom is a sandcastle in a storm.

Sites and Sights

The Prime Minister's residence can be found exactly at the Gold Ring's

geometric center and is by far the most ambitious and sumptuous building in the entire Endocity. But never in a million years would the Prez lower himself to honor the Prime Minister with a visit — "What? go down to that rotten dump?" And yet it is well worth a visit for its peaceful ponds, indoor gardens where cute, artificial — but undeniably alive — animals frolic, delicately perfumed air, huge verandas, temples, and fluid structures. In fact, all the abodes in the Gold Ring are masterpieces in their genre.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

The Gold Ring has the highest security of all the nine rings. Surveillance systems everywhere, directly linked to the Central Computer and the forces of repression, keep a discreet and efficient watch. Techno-Techno control is at a maximum here. Only the Aristos, who the systems automatically identify by visual means, and their robo-servants are allowed to circulate freely. Bottom-up entry points have also been designed to resist all forms of attack. In other words, you've got to be pretty suicidal to attempt a coup here.

Rumors

• "Have you heard? The Prez has secretly cloned himself into a female mutant and is mating with all the lowlife in the forbidden district."

• "No way! He's cloned himself into an anarcho-psychotic leader and is turning the Red Ring into a blazing bloodbath."

• "Get real! He's cloned himself into a conscientious Blue Ring worker and is living a nice well-ordered life."

• "Paleo-Zeus! Who the hell made this stuff up? The fact is he's cloned himself as me, and now's the time to make him suffer the ultimate indignation…"

• There's an unshakable myth — if it is a myth — that says the children of the lower levels are regu-larly abducted to be fed to the diabolical creatures bred by the Gold Ring's bloodthirsty tyrants.

Special Laws and Decrees

Two basic laws govern human relations between the Aristos and the hordes below. Directive 32B-75 stipulates that the Gold Ring is off limits to non-Aristos. Directive 32B-76 authorizes the Aristos to "mortally reprimand" anyone who breaches the first directive.

2 • The White Ring

The level just below the Gold Ring is the White Ring, an immense conglomeration of 30 levels, vertically tiered over four kilometers. All of the Endocity administrative and control offices are concentrated in this zone. Here the population density is much greater than that of the upper level ring, and the housing reflects this greater density. Thousands of descending shafts, moving walkways, and anti-g elevators cross and entangle one another, in the midst of vast halls where stressed-out robots and busy bio-representatives run back and forth all over the place. The White Ring encloses the Endocity's most secret and best protected room, that where the Central Computer, the Endocity's brain, sits. This specimen of subtle engineering with an incalculable cerebral power presides over the destiny of the entire planet, under the direct control of the Techno-Centrix, the supreme Techno-Techno intelligence, based on Central Planet. These mega-computers maintain a permanent and direct liaison using the most advanced of the mysterious Techno-Techno connection routes. From an urbanistic view, the various specialized zones have been arranged according to the function they provide. The hospital zone is accessible only to the most fortunate of inhabitants, those of the Golden Ring, the Silver Ring, and, if absolutely necessary, from the Blue Ring as well. This zone consists of thousands of operating rooms with busy robo-surgeons, coupled with a long series of corridors leading to patients' rooms, which are more or less luxurious according to whom the room is reserved. The control and surveillance rooms are grouped around the Central Computer room and can only be accessed by the Techno-Technos. Their cold functionality is characteristic of the Magnus Dei. The Endoguards' quarters are even more spartan. The Endoguards sleep in vertical compartments that take up only one square meter of floor space and three meters in height. To lodge the 10,000 men of the Endoguard battalion sent to each Endocity, two and a half acres suffice, which represents a surface that is smaller than the terrace of the Prime Minister's residence in the Golden Ring. Finally, the zones designated for administration and media are the only ones that offer a more lively visual aspect, since their modular conception permits layout modifications at regular intervals. It should be said that these are the only areas frequented by the majority of standard bios, those who have not undergone any particular training or re-programming.

The sun's rays no longer reach beyond this depth. Moreover, they don't even reach the last levels of the Golden Ring but for a few minutes or seconds each day. Of course, there is artificial lighting everywhere, but the beneficial effects of the solar star are a luxury that the ruling classes of the Endocity expressly make their own. An immense prismatic quartz, equipped with photonic deflectors has been set into low orbit, above the Prez's vessel. It concentrates and diffuses the solar rays down to the upper levels of the Blue Ring. Of course the quality and intensity are not the same everywhere, and as if it needs to be added, the rays are the best on the upper levels.

Immediately under the White Ring, a security level filters access to the two upper-level rings, the surface, and the Prez's vessel. This impassable barrier — guarded by the most impressive of the Techno-Techno security devices, a system of physical twists and turns that prohibits physical passage to the front for more than one person at a time, and most importantly an Endoguard post — is a preventative measure against any vague invasion impulse that may cross the minds of the lower-level population. This is something that has not yet occurred, but excessive precaution can do no harm. That said, the choice of where to place the security level ring clearly explains where priorities lie as far as safety is concerned: in case of a problem, only the two upper level rings would be saved, and everyone below would be sacrificed.

Environment and Residents

Despite an extremely high-population density, the White Ring is surprisingly quiet. Everyone here efficiently bustles about their work in silence. Well, maybe the patients in the hospital zone might scream from time to time when they wake up to find that all their limbs have been shortened, but the hundreds of millions of robotic entities go noiselessly about their various surgery, surveillance, management, planning and intervention tasks — in anti-g lift. Communications and instructions are likewise transmitted by silent impulses. Even the battalion of Endoguards billeted here makes hardly any noise. The only exception is the media zone. Everyone, from one of the many Diavaloo clones and human technician-operators to an eye witness of a horrific disaster, goes out of their way to make as much noise as possible, as if they were single-handedly trying to resist the machines' militant silence.

Sites and Sights

The colossal Central Hypertele Division alone — 15 levels high spread across ten kilometers — is a good reason for the 12 years of patience it takes on average to obtain a visa to visit the White Ring. Once you have seen the refrigerated hall where tens of thousands of girl clones wait to be gently warmed up for a dance, you can really die happy. For the really lucky — those who get authorization — the hospital zone's morgue is also worth a look.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

The White Ring is the central system consolidating all the operational bodies of power. As such, it requires special protection, particularly since it is the interface between two completely different worlds. Here, electronic surveillance reaches new heights especially since the White Ring is pretty much the private reserve of the Techno-Technos. Here, they experiment with systems of unprecedented sophistication. In addition to technological protection, the White Ring can also call on an entire battalion of Endoguards stationed here. The ring's lower level is one big protection and security area: a no man's land scaling 135 meters across tens of thousands of square kilometers — perfect terrain for a trench war.

Rumors

The underground levels firmly believe that a minute design fault has created a small breach in the White Ring's airtight security. This means that if a determined team managed to isolate the lower level's general power supply, it could get a foothold on this highly protected floor and, from there, reach the surface.

Special Laws and Decrees

Order XB 28-7 provides for the return to the maintenance workshop of all robotic equipment that gets lost in one of the 29 circulation levels. Likewise, any bio-entity that gets lost is cut up and its organs donated to the hospital zone's laboratories.

3 • The Silver Ring

Beneath the security level, at a depth of eight to 12 kilometers below the surface in the planet's mantle, stretching up over 30 levels is the Silver Ring — the Golden Ring's poor cousin, unanimously scorned by the upper-level Aristos. Certainly, the Silver Ring could be called a pretty place, a city that in itself lends to an agreeable way of life, with its airy spaces, and lovely facades. But it absolutely lacks the decadent and scathing breath of inspiration that brings about all of the Golden Ring's charm. Here, the architectural style and the atmosphere that prevails is the faithful reflection of its inhabitants, intermediary cogs in the wheel, stuck between the higher spheres, which they will never reach yet passionately long to be a part of, and the despised lower-level populations with whom they are forced to rub elbows. Everything functions with a touch and, although not luxurious, is quality made and of measured good taste. This closed universe, without great interest, withdrawn and at times burdensome, most certainly represents the inaccessible Grail for those underneath. But here, one lives with their eyes and hopes turned upwards, where simple villas would be palaces, and in perpetual fear of the ultimate tidal wave of anger and discontent rising from the lower masses.

Environment and Residents

The Silver Ring is the headquarters of the Endocity's working rulers. The Aristos wallow in idleness. The Silvers work. At least, they force themselves to live well-ordered productive lives and every day go conscientiously to their posts, where they watch the clock while drinking SPV, but in moderation. There is no flamboyance here, just discreet decorum that is the butt of Aristo ridicule. In addition to a penchant for discretion and thrift, the Silvers also differ in their natural tendency to save. Stuck between the unattainable easy life and the teeming lower levels, the Silver Ring is in a constant state of anxiety that it has only ever managed to assuage by amassing ever more wealth. Understandably, as these resources are taken directly from the crumbs the Aristos leave for the lower floors, the entire population of the Endocity hates the Silvers as companions in misfortune who exploit their poverty and rob them.

Sites and Sights

If the Silvers ever gave a guided tour of their domain, the Silver Ring's cen-

The Intra-urban Ferrymen

There are "ferrymen," bus drivers, taxi drivers, or delivery endo-nef drivers, who, acting on their own, propose diverse services that are not always lawful. A "ferryman" generally possesses a private vehicle and knows every endo-port in his Endocity, traveling in record time from one level to another, and helping his passengers to avoid being subjected to the authorities' anger. According to his designated allocation or the people he is transporting, he can easily have access to a warehouse, garage or mechanics garage, a safe refuge or a discrete airlock with direct access to upper-level rings.

tral warehouse would be the first dream destination. You have to see this gigantic edifice, not so much for its quite banal architecture, but for what is stored there. As with lobster, the best is inside. Ten floors high and nearly 20 kilometers across, the central warehouse gives a whole new slant to the idea of Ali Baba's cave.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

The Silver Ring is beneath the security level, so it is pretty much on its own in defending itself against the ragged hordes below. Yet the Silvers have no lack of resources and are always equipped with formidably efficient systems. The most sophisticated technology is exclusively reserved for the Aristos and the White Ring, but the second choice still offers very powerful solutions. Colossal firepower hooked up to detection devices points at the lower levels.

Rumors

The age-old rumor here, even though it might be mere delusion, is that the guardians of the Silver Ring can enter the Gold Ring once they have lived in the Silver Ring for a hundred generations. On the lower levels, some say that the Silvers are all the crazy bastard children of the Aristos. Further down, they swear blind that they are the submissive slaves of the Aristos, that the SPV keeps them in a state of frustrated lust, and that certain glands are systematically removed from them to make them lethargic. Word everywhere also has it that the Silver Ring's best-looking young girls and boys are regularly taken to the top to be "consumed."

Special Laws and Decrees

Legislation AR-01-0R specifically states: "Silver is silver and gold is gold. Forget that at your own peril."

4 • The Blue Ring

Below the Silver Ring, still deeper toward the planet's core, comes the Blue Ring, the last ring where one can still catch a glimpse of the sky. Already the sun's rays — concentrated and diffused by the prismatic quartz — only reach but a small portion of the ring. With a height of fifty levels spread out vertically over four kilometers, the Blue Ring is a long succession of habitation units where the charming, mediocre, and sometimes even the dilapidated alternate. Hundreds of millions of people live in this space. They represent the average Endocity citizen. They are those who execute with zeal and ardor the useless tasks that they are given, before wisely returning home to indulge in the lawful enjoyment of the hypertele and Cocaloco Dark. Surrounding the central shaft, the habitation galleries plunge deep into the planet, reaching down several hundreds of kilometers. A dense transportation network links the different zones. Here and there, the decor is brightened by some artificial islands of vegetation. Certain quarters can even appear agreeable. However, as one proceeds down the shaft, the quality of housing and facilities becomes progressively poorer. As one approaches the edge of the Green Ring, the agreeable buildings are nothing more than something "once seen somewhere." Here begins the dismal reign.

At the junction of the Blue and Green Rings, a vast overhanging promenade makes its way around the shaft. This is Suicide Alley. Perky Endocity citizens like to stroll around this wide promenade to watch people fall, and those who have reached rock bottom come to meditate on the endless emptiness of their existence before throwing themselves over.

Environment and Residents

The luxury stops here. Some very pleasant havens are dotted about to and fro, but they seem out of place. It's as if they've been randomly planted there, flowers in the middle of a garbage dump. As the facades peel and crack, the inhabitants all take on the same tired look, stooping and staring. From this level on, leisure is less subtle and distractions more radical. The millstone of the Necro-Dream starts to weigh heavily around their necks. Their mind-numbing lives are filled with mediocre drugs and hypertele everywhere. It is impossible to choose any other path and easy to understand why thousands of applicants turn up daily at Suicide Alley on the lower level. A midway point, the Blue Ring is "the mean" in all senses of the word.

Sites and Sights

You can't really appreciate the Endocity until you've seen Suicide Alley. This wide, airy promenade is the soul of the shaft, the very essence of life in this dismal world. If you really want to capture all the blissfully dramatic poetry of the place, go at dawn when the climate regulation system considerately produces a fine ashen mist that lingers in long ribbons along the jagged edges of the gray teflo-concrete. Just before six o'clock, when the first desperately lost soul arrives, broken-spirited and desolate, a few drops of rain subtly fall to heighten the intensity of the moment. A last look, a last sob… And he jumps.

Do feel free to applaud.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

The Blue Ring has few vital or strategic points, so there are not many automatic security systems. However, there is a massive police presence. Bands of cybo-cops constantly circulate or hover nearby, ready to intervene. Around Suicide Alley especially, it is not uncommon for a movement from the crowd — often just showing their enthusiasm for a particularly outstanding leap — to provoke a furious charge. When this happens, the dead are not counted among the total suicides, unless of course they jump of their own free will.

Rumors

"Suicide Alley is closing down!" This is the most frequent of the alarmist rumors and the one that can push the desperate over the edge. Yet word also has it that the suicide victims don't actually die but are intercepted to be used as guinea pigs. After a fall of approximately five minutes and 45 seconds — 18 kilometers at some 200 kilometers an hour — a recuperation system just above the surface of the Acid Lake is said to catch the condemned

wretches — at least those not killed in the fall — and make them disappear from.

Special Laws and Decrees

The famous special SHOOT-75 decree authorizes anyone to hasten the suicide victims' passage to the beyond, although combat lasers and sonic weapons are prohibited. Nevertheless, regulation FAIL-76 considers failed suicides — accidental fall from an intermediate terrace — to be a violation of private property liable to a 200-kublar fine. The debt is immediately and irrevocably contracted as soon as the infringement is recorded and the fine pronounced — generally within three to five seconds.

5 • The Green Ring

Fifth ring down from the surface, the Green Ring owes its name to reflections from Acid Lake, which tinge the surrounding air with greenish glimmers. If the Blue Ring is considerably less welcoming and comfortable than the Golden Ring, the difference between the Blue and Green Rings is at least as great, if not greater. There are 100 levels packed in one against the other along the four allotted kilometers of height, double the amount of levels in the Blue Ring. Here there is no synthetic vegetable decor, not the smallest flourish, nor the tiniest ornament, just hundreds of stereotypically aligned kilometers. Housing is in decrepit condition. Even on an Endocity inauguration day, the foot bridges, like the facades, have the same dilapidated appearance as the ruins they are going to become. Despite their degree of elevated technology, the transport systems, which run throughout the innermost recesses of the hundred levels, appear ancient. The automatic repair systems are deactivated, and traces of fire and other damages accumulate, painting a picture of hopeless devastation. From an architectural and urbanistic point of view, the Green Ring reminds one of the most hideous urban projects that not so long ago disfigured Terra Prima's megalopolises… but in an even worse version.

Environment and Residents

The Green Ring's three to four billion inhabitants would love to leave this staggeringly crammed and overpopulated place. Here, density hits astounding record highs, surpassing all reasonable bounds. It is not humanly possible to endure such overcrowding without going mad. So the Greens, used to being constantly on the verge of madness, have wound up partially immunizing themselves against depression. Although every day brings its batch of massacres and bloody murders committed under the effects of a totally understandable psychotic lunacy, all things considered, it could be worse. This attitude probably has something to do with the habit — learnt from childhood by playing at survival in the dumps — of living each moment as if it were their last. Before they go mad, the Greens are basically happy souls. They laugh at everything, others and themselves.

Sites and Sights

The entire Green Ring is an interesting sight. This assembly of long uniform bars — made from a jagged jumble caused by fire and destruction — harbors many treasures. Here, there's a makeshift camp built around huge braziers with a swarm of screaming kids who methodically destroy the automatic transport. There, at the bend of a ripped-up avenue, is a huge open-air market where bartering, black marketeering, receiving, and all sorts of trafficking go on amidst rows of housing blocks, like a return to the wild. Everywhere, life bursts forth violent and unruly with a never-ending show of despair, confrontations, and jubilant guffaws.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

Official surveillance within the bounds of the Green Ring is the most moderate. The inhabitants can tear each other's guts out in peace with no fear of being charged by a squad of irate cybo-cops. However, when things take on alarming proportions, and if the situation risks spreading into the neighboring rings, the robofiremen descend with cybo-cop riot units and sometimes even the Endoguard.

Rumors

The day will come when the hordes of outcasts will rise from the bowels of the shaft and attack the higher levels.

Special Laws and Decrees

Here, the law is stated as an adage: Bio-life is tolerated as long as the Endocity runs smoothly.

Concrete Seagulls

It's from the Green Ring that one can catch a glimpse of the first "concrete seagulls." These winged creatures who come from the lowest levels, notably from the Primal Ring's enormous garbage dumps, feed themselves on the micro-organisms that grow on the teflo-concrete walls as a result of their being passed over by the cleaning systems. Peeping and ravenous, the concrete seagulls are practically offering a public service in preventing the proliferation of mutant seaweed and mushrooms. Their excrement falls into the Acid Lake, which reinforces its corrosive power. Despite their naturally wild character, it is said that certain ones have been tamed.

6 • The Red Ring

The 50 levels of the Red Ring stretch out between the twentieth and twenty-fourth kilometers below the planet's surface. The Red Ring is an agglomeration of disparate constructions made immediately recognizable by their scarlet color. In fact, the streets are covered by a crimson-colored teflo-tarmac layer. Billions of neon facades are reflected in the tarmac, casting a thousand ruby-colored lights on every horizon of this circular space. The ring of the most extreme and unrestrained pleasures, it appears less rundown than its immediate neighbors. But the flashing lights and showcases conceal a nameless crass that is the strict reflection of the prevailing debauchery. This said, having legal access to the most diverse of synthetic

paradises, as well as ultra-qualified services in human, alien, mutant, and synthetic prostitution, visitors can easily forget the ambient ugliness as they drown themselves in a whirlwind of endless orgies.

Environment and Residents

All sorts of beings tread the Red Ring's vermilion tarmac. In addition to the locals — prostitutes of all shapes and sizes, legal and illegal drug dealers, thugs, hoods, louts, receivers, informers, thieves, and murderers — countless day trippers pour in day and night to slum it, get wildly drunk, wallow in the opiate fumes, fight, get robbed, or simply kill someone for kicks. It's a favorite hangout for bands of binging Aristos, duly escorted by their Hunchback minders. However, all levels of the Endocity's population visit the Red Ring's establishments at some stage or other. Despite the rundown interiors behind the flashy shop windows — like the haggard features of an old whore under her thick make-up — this mecca of depravity has a strong magnetism that no one can resist. It is the center of the Endocity, its heartbeat.

Sites and Sights

The Homeo First Club, the largest homeo-whorehouse, is the crown temple of love for sale. Here, customers can find the perfect partner and steer clear of those imperfections that diminish their pleasure and bridle their fantasies. Customers mix and match their chosen whore's body parts safe in the knowledge that the curve of the hip and the breast will perfectly replicate the erotic dream they had the night before.

Suicide Alley

The only place in the Endocity where suicide is legally authorized — from six o'clock in the morning to ten o'clock at night, seven days a week — Suicide Alley attracts the curious and desperate Endocity masses. "Intelligent" billboards placed at intervals of 50 meters each display the hour and total number of suicides. By request (and paid for), the boards can also furnish statistics of those who have committed suicide — sex, age, and the number of unfortunate ones who arrive at Acid Lake still alive. For the modest sum of three kublars, one can even watch the day's best suicide sequences. The curious onlookers who come to watch the last jumps of voyagers leaving for a possibly better world, applaud their performances from the parapet, or even from small barges in stationary flight in the shaft. The most sadistic spectators prefer to shoot at those committing suicide, deriving great pleasure from depriving the unlucky ones from their ultimate chosen trip. For those who choose to die, the process isn't as simple as it may seem. All the more so because for the unlucky ones who botch their fall, an unpleasant surprise awaits them: a 200 kublar fine for a failed suicide. An injured person in agony — who landed badly on an intermediary platform — will find himself being booked by the cybo-cops on duty, even if he ends up dying in the following seconds. As soon as the fine is announced, it is registered, and the debt is passed on to the surviving members of the family.

The Flesh Industry

Prostitution is primarily concentrated in the Red Ring. As a general rule, the prostitutes work for a bar or a "house of pleasure" and are in this case under the protection of a pimp-guardian. However, some do work for themselves, doing business on the streets. As the Red Ring is frequented by all types of tourists, window shoppers, and buyers, it is not uncommon for the discrete eyes and ears of the streets to become aware of rumors, confessions, and little known secrets.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

Unlike most of the rings, the Red Ring is not under constant surveillance. There is no watching eye at every street corner so it's wise to go out armed or accompanied. However, the units of Hunchbacks and cybo-cops have direct access shafts they can use to surge through the Red Ring's 50 levels in record time. Crime control is simple: as soon as the crime statistics reach a certain level, the troops descend. The cybo-cops then eliminate thousands of people at random. Consequently, although some of the victims are innocent bystanders who are generally visiting customers, crime usually plummets. But it doesn't last long, and the whole cycle starts over again. To escape the monotony, the Central Computer has introduced a random variable into the definition of the crime level whereby two raids can be organized just two days apart. However, six months could also pass without a single visit from the cybo-cops. The only thing that's for sure is that you never know when it's going to happen.

Rumors

The Red Ring's main roads and alleyways buzz with a thousand and one rumors. The most insistent is the prediction of an imminent cybo-cop raid. However, it's not uncommon to hear that the Prez himself will make an impromptu visit — incognito since a recent secret cloning — or that a troupe of perverse Aristos disguised as psycho-anarchists will descend on the place. Another rumor that regularly goes round is that of an imminent armed raid on the lower levels, which could well prove to be prophetic. Word also often has it that the cybo-cops sometimes take specimens up from the Red Ring to satisfy the Aristos' curiosity.

Special Laws and Decrees

An arsenal of legal texts — changing day to day with the Hunchbacks' bad moods — govern the conditions

under which theft and racketeering are not really authorized, but more or less tolerated. When the police forces intervene, they more often than not invoke Decree ZB23-6 before firing into the crowd. A rider still in force defines the status of the pimp-guardians — the human prostitutes' official pimps. And the Central Computer's imprescriptible Edict 001 lays down the conditions for the closure of levels by the cybo-cops and the random eradication of delinquent populations. Hearing a loudspeaker blare "Pursuant to Edict 001…" generally means you've only got a few more seconds to live.

Street Preachers

When they are not in the streets, haranguing the crowds, these apocalyptic prophets and other revolutionary cult priests are found hanging out on the terraces of Red Ring bars (where they recuperate from paleo- hangovers and the effects of hallucinogenic drugs). Their only "power" lies in convincing a few citizens of their corrupt lives and their era's degradation. But if certain sermons incite no more than a general indifference, other more convincing ones set off veritable riots. The preachers are closely watched by the cybo-cops, and frequently serve as scapegoats for urban incidents that are even provoked by the cybo-cops themselves!

7 • The Primal Ring

Immediately beneath the Red Ring comes the Primal Ring. This industrial ring, which stretches out over hundreds of kilometers in length and four kilometers in height, is an infinite series of production sites, warehousing, recycling and treatment plants, and purification and elimination sites. It is here that the planet's natural treasures — the ore and energy resources that it contains — are collected, concentrated, and transformed before being injected into the Endocity. It is also from the Primal Ring that the Techno-Technos' maintenance robots manage the gigantic Endocity distribution network. This colossal maze — which covers each level of every ring in all directions — distributes air, water, and light and transports all of the technical cables for the climate-control system. Hundreds of millions of kilometers of ducts and pipes run throughout the planet's belly, hidden in the globe's mass. However, quantities of other unaccounted-for tunnels have been pierced, especially in the lower levels. In addition to these facilities and infrastructure, the Primal Ring houses a water reservoir large enough to hold an ocean and an enormous dump, bigger than the biggest of Endoguard vessels.

Environment and Residents

Despite the din of the machines and the cursed blast of their putrid breath, the Primal Ring is virtually a haven of peace. They work conscientiously and meticulously in a soft hiss of well-oiled movements, under the cool eye of the bio-operators high on SPV. From time to time, a long fatigued sigh troubles this beautiful mechanical order. Nevertheless, bands of kids from the neighboring rings haunt the giant tips, hardened from pitting their wits against the vigilant reflexes of the surveillance robots. In the zones where the Techno-Techno rulers all too happily leave them to their own devices, social misfits and dropouts from all levels claim scraps of abandoned technology and patch them together for new uses.

Sites and Sights

The Primal Ring's meta-dump is a sight to be seen, even if it is a bit of a health hazard. Elsewhere, the factories offer a most interesting visit, especially since they contain all the equipment needed to inspire guerrilla and other terrorist attacks. But be warned: Techno-Techno vigilance is high here.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

Wherever the presence of unofficial bio-intruders is no trouble, they are simply ignored and even tolerated. However, the protected zones are guarded by force fields, automatic firing batteries, and psychopathic cybo-cops who are not particularly good at negotiating.

Rumors

Two main rumors take turns circulating around the lower rings. Some days, they say that the extermination of the Endocity's population will be planned and orchestrated by the Primal Ring. Other days, they swear that terrorist troupes will attack the ring and seize all the arms it contains to take the entire Endocity. And when some harmless epidemic hits the neighboring levels, they insist on an alleged plan by the authorities to spread deadly diseases throughout all the lower levels. But then again, maybe that's not just gossip…

Special Laws and Decrees

A constantly updated manufacturing schedule defines the Primal Ring's production goals. Should the planning departments think these goals cannot be met, law PROD 59-7 authorizes them to massively recruit all the manpower they need from the Blue, Green, and Red Rings to get back on schedule. Paragraph 37-6 of this law also provides for an adjustment of demand to supply (that is, the elimination of consumers who cannot be satisfied). It goes without saying that any such extermination concerns only the inhabitants of the last six rings.

8 • The Sub Ring

Next come the bowels of the Endocity, the unmentionable and forgotten — a place where very few inhabitants of the upper levels have ever gone. There is first the Sub Ring, a layer of 50 levels laden with unaccounted for tunnel-like galleries where the most miserable populations of the Endocity rot: the deprived, imported as they are from other worlds of agony, or the destitute that a swarming concentration of humanity naturally produces. But that's not all, because ten levels are strictly reserved for mu-

tants, those pariahs among pariahs. The mutant quarter is a hermetically closed area, sinister and lugubrious, where all light is forbidden. Access is strictly controlled, but the Prez's Hunchbacks and the cybo-cops don't consider it beneath themselves to go down from time to time to expend some of their aggressive energy.

Environment and Residents

The Sub Ring, a land of social outcasts, dropouts, and mutants, is a foretaste of hell. Life here is far from easy. Supplies rarely arrive, and the standard installations and equipment are just heaps of teflo-concrete delivered and left as they are by the Techno-Techno machines. There may be loads of space, but these vast bare expanses where only a few landslides provide some relief are anything but welcoming. For the authorities, it's as if the Endocity ended at the Primal Ring. Everything after that is irrelevant. The poor wretches who live here know they cannot count on handouts from the city. And when they are stigmatized, as the mutants are, the problems attain an unimaginable level. Aside from the mutants, the Sub Ring harbors all the Endocity's rejects, those with nothing left to sell and no more strength to steal.

Sites and Sights

> ***Water Reserves***
>
> *Water that planets contain before their transformation into an Endocity is given over to the Ekonomat. In exchange, the Ekonomat offers one of its exclusive secret hydrogen-and-oxygen-separation devices. A reservoir the size of an inland sea is coupled with the system. With a capacity equaling one week's consummation, it serves as a reserve back-up system. The water is neither purified nor recycled. After use in the distribution system, it is collected, then separated into hydrogen and oxygen atoms. The impurities, sediment, and other residue are automatically evacuated into the Acid Lake. Even if somewhere in its memory banks the Central Computer has a precise record of the distribution network, no human being could possibly comprehend the extent or entirety of this system.*

The totally rundown Sub Ring offers nothing of interest to the visitor, except maybe the mutant neighborhood — the GTO on a portion of level 30 of the city-shaft. Particularly perverse Aristos pay exorbitant prices for the 20-odd tourist passes issued every year for this neighborhood. Suicidal and reckless explorers can always try their luck without the pass, but no one who has attempted it has ever come back.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

No measures have been taken to ensure civil peace in the Sub Ring. However, the mutant neighborhood is surrounded by a draconian surveillance system, and those who attempt to leave before the age of 21 are immediately eliminated.

Rumors

Word has it that the Endocity's authorities plan to raise the level of the Acid Lake unexpectedly one day to drown all the inhabitants of the Black Ring and the Sub Ring.

> ***The Plight of the Mutants***
>
> *Like all the mutants in the universe, those in the Endocities are victims of the destructive effects of technology. Namely, the pillage of element K — human awareness or the life force inherent in humans — by the Techno-Techno machines, which makes them into a humanity hybrid. In the fusion, they take on an animal characteristic and lose a part of what made them full-fledged humans.*

Special Laws and Decrees

Two main measures govern the lives of the mutants. Firstly, there is a total ban on light and color in the ten levels of their neighborhood — by order of the Techno-Techno urb-ethnologists, who believe that it prevents mutants from yielding to their animal instincts. Secondly, mutants are prohibited from leaving the GTO before the age of 21. Anyone who does will be shot on sight by the urban hunters. The law governing the urban hunters is fairly flexible, and there are no repercussions for killing an adult mutant.

Typical Mutant

This generic character can be used with the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game*.

Agility 3D+1: brawling 4D, melee combat 3D+2, running 4D+1. Knowledge 3D+2: streetwise 4D+2, survival 4D+1, willpower 4D. Mechanical 2D. Perception 3D+2: hide 5D, sneak 4D+2. Strength 3D: climb/jump 3D+1, lift 3D+1. Technical 2D+1. Psionics 0D. Move 10. Character Points 1. Equipment: Ragged clothes. Note: Individual mutants may have special abilities, such as claws (STR+1D) or sticky spit (victim gets +5 to all difficulties when using affected limb or body part).

9 • The Black Ring

Finally, comes the Black Ring, the point of the Endocity's conic shape, the last trace of the Techno-Techno intervention in the interior of the planet. With only ten levels spread vertically over four kilometers of height, the Black Ring offers the same vast spaces as the Golden Ring, but the decor is quite different. The lowest level, the tenth, forms the bank of Acid Lake. Far from being a holiday resort, this coast of desolation is nothing but a long shoreline of teflo-concrete blocks eaten away by the lake's ultracorrosive fumes. Survival may seem impossible here. However, one comes across crowds of people: the psycho-anarchists, the worst of the Endocity's mobs, the most extreme sects, completely pro-

hibited secret societies, and tons of bored desperados ready and willing to explode the planet in order to forget the tedium of their existence.

Managing such a group as revealed here may seem complicated, but the Techno-Technos dispose of weapons that constitute a considerable power and aid. The Central Computer is instantaneously informed of anything brewing or being plotted in the lower level areas and can immediately dispatch one of the many intervention forces at its service — Hunchbacks, cybo-cops, or Endoguards — to quickly restore order.

But there are still other advantages, in particular the Necro-Dream. In fact, as the Endocity is a perfectly enclosed space, it is the ideal place to implement the subtle stratagem of subser-vience, which maintains the general population in a contented state of dumbstruck bliss.

In addition to the Necro-Dream, the mind of the masses is well occupied by the omnipresent drug culture, the hypertele, suicides, riots, terrorist acts, and accidents caused by the psycho-anarchists — all perfectly mastered and orchestrated by the Magnus Dei henchmen — which further encourages the masses to stay huddled together, snuggling in their mutual stupor.

Thanks to the Church of the Industrial Saints, the Necro-Dream is spreading, and the Tenebrae's opaque shroud is slowly masking the conscious of living beings.

The Urban Terrorists

Everywhere where authority and discipline are lauded as virtues, protest and anarchy come into being, as do so many other natural counter-currents, and are thus anticipated by the Techno-Technos. The urban terrorists are rarely isolated and generally act within the numerous small anarchist groups found in the Endocities. In abandoned warehouses, they secretly gather to stir up assassi-nation attempts and prepare for rioting. If rebellion is a necessity for some, for others it is just a form of distraction and amusement. These grassroots terrorists go to great lengths to add some animation to the streets. However, these urban terrorists should not be confused with Amok crimi-nals, who don't even have the decency and manners to warn the 3D hypertele when they plant a bomb!

Environment and Residents

The Black Ring is an asylum of misery and desolation, a vast closed, arid space where the Endocity's waste arrives en masse and the city-shaft's most wretched subsist in conditions closer to barbarity than civilization. On this fertile compost heap, violence and resentment flourish. The upper levels couldn't care less about their fate; they'd rather see them all dead.

Sites and Sights

In addition to the psycho-anarchists, different rebel clans have set up base here. They have dug new galleries where they have set up a confusion of camps built from all sorts of salvaged materials. The Aristos would find the place great fun for an evening, but life on the shores of the Acid Lake gets more hideous every day.

Security Level and Surveillance Systems

The Techno-Techno authorities do not think it worthwhile to install any surveillance in the Black Ring. However, all the rebel factions who have set up base here mount a guard 24 hours a day. They rightly fear a fatal raid by the surface forces and live in a permanent state of emergency.

Rumors

Of all the rumors in the Endocity, those about the Black Ring are the worst: They are cannibals, they breed creatures from hell, they have made a pact with the underground forces, and so on. It is also said that they guard the entrance to a fabulous secret world where mind-boggling treasures lie. But nobody has ever managed to find out if this is true.

Special Laws and Decrees

Only two laws apply here: the law of the jungle, and the law of the strongest.

The Acid Lake

The Acid Lake is a huge swampy reservoir with greenish fluorescent waves as caustic as snake urine. It is created during the construction of an Endocity to receive all the waste from the machines building the cities. The organic remains of the living organisms absorbed by the machines — humanoids, fauna, flora, etc. — are also tipped into the lake. Once a city-shaft has been completed, no one — not even the Techno-urbanists — knows where its toxic flow goes. This creates a great deal of gossip and conjecture. However, one thing's for sure, they seep down slowly and form a liquid core at the center of the planet — a highly dangerous and volatile concentrate.

The Crados

Below the Black Ring, on the very edge of the Acid Lake, legend has it that there is a race of "garbage people," the remnants of the people who lived on the planet before the Techno-Technos claimed it. Only the lowest denizens of the Black Ring might have seen this lost race. Even if you could ask them, you'd never know whether they were lying.

Typical Endocity Citizen

This generic character can be used with the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* for any adult human living below the Silver Ring. A lucky few might have a couple of kublars, but those will be spent as fast as possible on drugs, entertainment, or food (in that order).

Agility 2D: brawling 2D+2, dodge 2D+2, running 3D. Knowledge 2D: streetwise 3D, security regulations 2D+1, survival 3D. Mechanical 2D. Perception 2D: bargain 2D+2, con 2D+1, gaming 3D+1. Strength 2D. Technical 2D. Psionics 0D. Move 10. Character Points 0. Equipment: Clothes.

The Universe

"Pssst… More than 30,000 years to come to this… What sadness! I can't even find the words to tell you how I feel. And yet! And yet all the same, everything could have been so different… no lies, no treason. If only man had not forgotten…

"Allow me to reveal certain secrets and share my regrets. For never again, in perhaps all of eternity, will an intelligent being have the chance to hold such richness in his hands, and have within his reach a power equal to that of the gods. Because the universe is an almost inexhaustible source of kindness, and if man had had the wisdom to make good use of it, he could have spent all of eternity wandering in a continually replenished Eden. Imagine if only for a moment, the colossal quantities of energy, the endlessly infinite space…."

–John D.

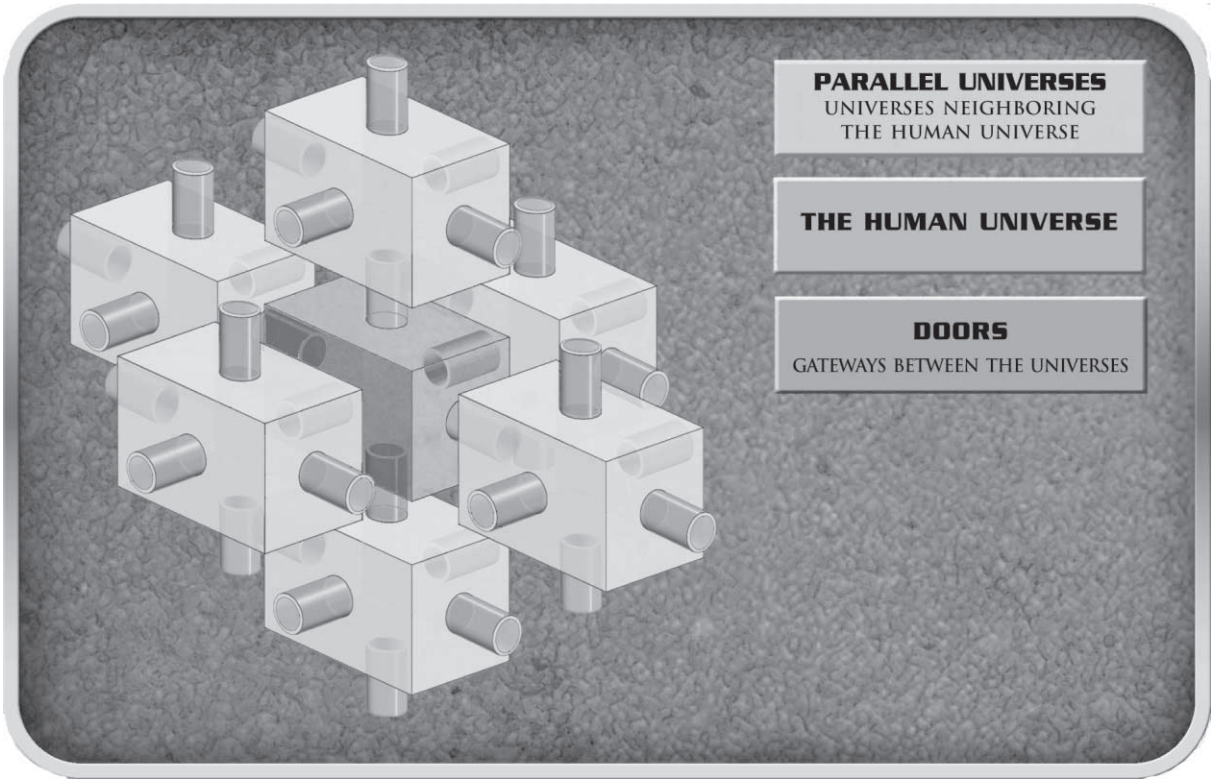
The Major Equilibria

Considered from a global point of view, the universe is a mass of indistinct and vague contours. It is finite, but it has no boundaries. Its aspect is slightly helicoidal, no doubt attributable to its original expansion in a tremendous primeval whirlwind, but it reveals on a macro-scale a general form that could be qualified as parallelepipedal. In short, the universe may be thought of as a brick, more or less a cobblestone suspended in the void.

The universe's mass is neither homogenous nor dense. It is not either one because the universe is studded with "wormholes" — tunnels made of exogenous matter, which form a multitude of passageways leading toward distant zones and galaxies. As space is curved, these wormholes constitute shortcuts between points which are extremely distant from one another if one follows the outlines of the curve, but near if one cuts across the curve. The universe preserved some of these passageways which had been naturally formed during its creation. But humans, and particularly the adherents of the Church of the Industrial Saints, constructed phenomenal quantities of manmade passageways. These fantastic communication routes facilitate exploration of the most remote zones, allowing the Empire to establish its hegemony over billions of galaxies.

From a technical standpoint, it would seem that the Techno-Techno formula consists in making an antimatter containment field that traps, sets, and launches the antimatter toward a specific destination. At the very moment of its creation, this atypical polarization collapses inward, much like a black hole whose mass has become too dense, opening a passage into the intersidereal vacuum. The Techno-Technos' genius lies in their ability to successfully fix this highly unstable state without bringing on cataclysmic side effects. Once open, the tunnel — a long corridor of positive void cutting across the negative void — knows no variations in its state or form. The only way to enter or exit is through the end points. The entire length of the tunnel is protected by a polarized sheath, which no physical element, not even the smallest particle of matter, can penetrate.

For the time being, the Techno-Technos monopolize the tunnel construction industry, but it cannot be ruled out



that other powerful groups also master the keys to this technology. Officially, these great highways of intergalactic communication are under the joint control of the Church of the Industrial Saints and the Endoguard. In fact, guarding the tunnels is quite simple, as it suffices to supervise the entrance and exit points, which are generally located in proximity to major star systems and galaxies. The tunnels shorten the distance between extremely distant galaxies in the universe, but it is still often necessary to continue one's voyage in hyperspace within the same galaxy to arrive at one's destination.

All in all, the universe contains billions of distinct and separate galaxies floating in space, which is made up of dust, various gases, atomic particles, and other bizarre things. To give you an idea of its excessive size, take the example of Terra Prima's solar system in the Milky Way galaxy. Supposing that the distance between Terra Prima and its sun represents a micron, one thousandth of a millimeter. The diameter of the Milky Way would then be 6.3 kilometers, the distance between Andromeda and Terra Prima would be 126.6 kilometers, the Paleo-Virgo star cluster would be at 2,278.8 kilometers, the Big Dipper star cluster at 106,344 kilometers, and the probable limits of the universe at 759,600 kilometers.

The universe is a wild place, untamed and unpredictable. Obviously, it does obey a certain number of laws. First of all, there are of course the seven great physical forces or fundamental interactions known since time immemorial of paleo-history.

Number one, gravitational interaction, commonly known as gravity, is the attractive force carried out between all particles in the universe.

Number two, electromagnetic interaction, is the force which links electrons to the atom's nucleus.

Number three, strong interaction, is the force that assures the cohesion of the atom's nucleus.

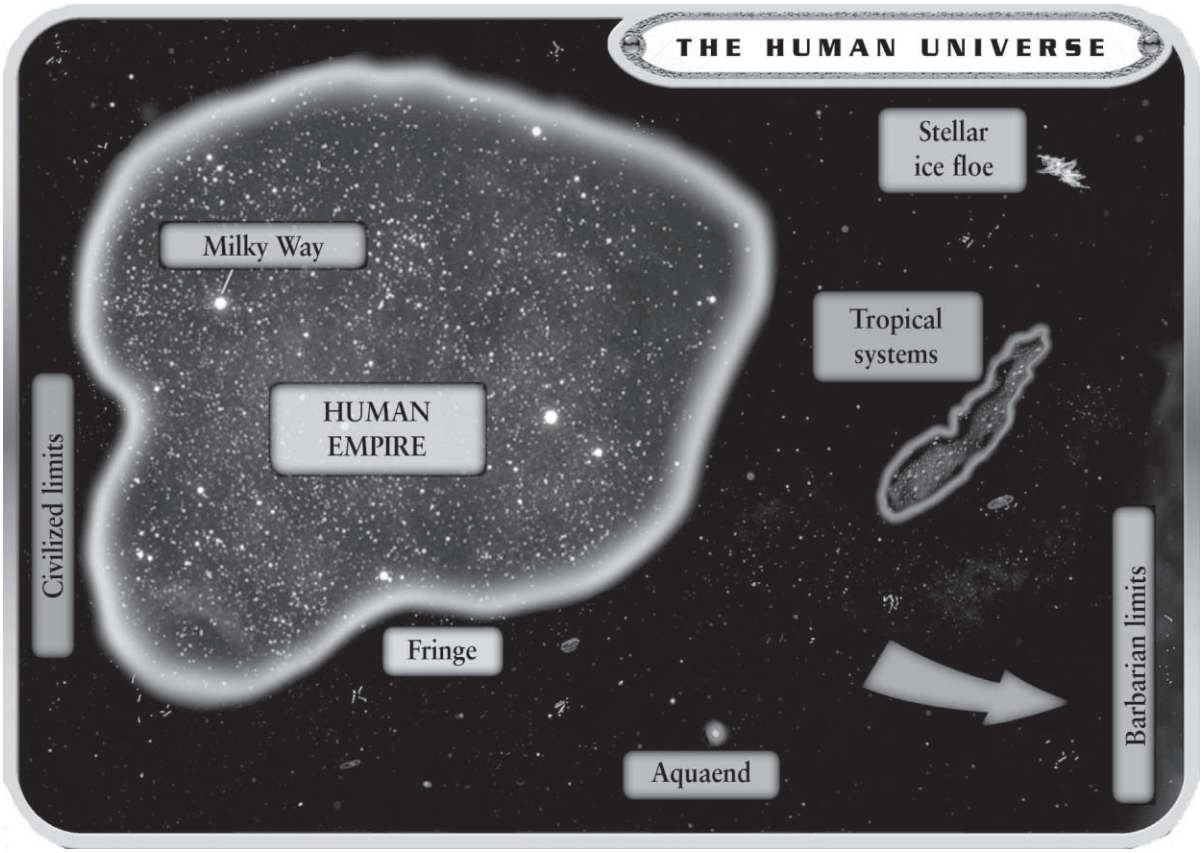
Number four is weak interaction, which despite its name happens to be the force accountable for, among other things, the disintegration of certain particles. For those who are interested, this last case would otherwise be known as radioactivity.

Number five, psycho-magnetic interaction, is the attraction-repulsion force, which displaces celestial bodies with respect to one another, as a function of the emotional vibrations they emit.

Number six, cerebro-fluid interaction, is the force with which a system's intelligence acts on the major flux.

Finally, number seven, cosmo-carnal interaction, is the great force that permanently places universal elements of the male principle in rotation around elements associated with the female principle. At times, the universe records a cosmo-carnal activity peak. These huge orgasmic convulsions generally end with a paroxysmal contraction, immediately followed by an overall release, that is sometimes called a galactic rut, or in lay terms, galactic heat.

These principles have been authenticated and proven to be true more or less everywhere in the Human Universe. But as the universe is a rather unfathomable, frothing maelstrom, there inevitably exist still other unknown forces. Moreover, signs of these forces are often perceptible in the galactic infinity and particularly when one approaches the extreme limits or when one has just brushed up against the universal borders.



The Borders of the Empire and Beyond

At the Empire's borders, with its howling wild winds and raging acid rains, the universe is not a friendly place. This obscure and ethereal frontier marks the end of the world as conceived by our intelligence. Bewilderingly barbaric conditions and colossal atmospheric pressure prevent humans from surviving in this zone. Moreover, certain paleo-erudite scholars, have estimated from some archaic vestiges that the Empire's borders could very well be the mythical Hell.

The borders mark a line that has never been crossed. However, what is behind is no longer entirely the unknown. Today we do know what can be found there. But it remains that the physical crossing of the borders is still an absolute impossibility. For your information, below i a never-before-seen document. It is not recent, as it is more than 20,000 standard years old, but it is enlightening. It illustrates well what a confrontation with the definitive extreme can represent.

There has to be something there, in the beyond. There had been the galacto-barbarian invasions and other incursions from exogenous aliens. The borders couldn't be this ultimate extremity that limits reality. But then what could be there? Do the frontiers have to be a limit, or could they be a threshold?

Incidentally, it turned out that beyond the borders, there are other universes. In fact, due to an independent and capricious cosmic logic, the finite and autonomous universes are drawing nearer to one another, assembling themselves to form an alveolar structure of an inconceivable dimension on the human scale. the Human Universe is not alone, and there exists an infinite number of parallel universes, where what is truth here, is nothing more than a memory there, and a simple probability elsewhere.

All of these universes, stuck one to the other, stacked up like a wall of bricks, are not like watertight cells living side by side in extreme ignorance. They know one another, see each other, keep up relations, and above all communicate. Remember that in 13612, the first contacts were established with neighboring parallel universes, and in 13637, the Human Universe officially joined the Confederation of Parallel Universes. Thus, there exists a point of access. And if the borders are perfectly impassable, there exist nevertheless doors, allowing the passage from one universe to another.

There are six doors in all. Each one opens into a universe which is the exact opposite of the one just left behind. For example, at the borders where an atrocious cold reigns, the Temper-Ut door, whose guardian is Uakl, leads to a scorching hot universe. Similarly, in front of the Mardador door, guarded by Ganjez, the universe is light and flowing, but as soon as one crosses the threshold, one penetrates into a dimension where everything is infinitely compact, presenting an extraordinary density.

Just as suspended molecules search out one another and gather together according to their own alchemy, the universes group together as a function of attraction-repulsion factors, generating polarity. It is perhaps a coincidence of creation that associated the Human Universe with only six others, but could this number have been another? It should be known that at this time the phenomenon of universes regrouping is not well known. We do not know how many other universes are amalgamated amongst themselves in a similar fashion. Moreover, nothing refutes the existence of an infinite number of parallel universes.

Nevertheless, a certain number of constants may be observed: The border of each universe is in every way impassable. There is always a door between two universes, and the realities, physical and other, of each side of the threshold are systematically diametrically opposed. The doors existence is a jealously guarded secret, known only by a minute number of initiates. Rare are those who have had the privilege to cross the threshold. All the more so because the doors are placed under the care of an extremely vigilant custodian, generally a being of sublime essence. These custodians have a material reality in each of the two universes, linked by the door they guard. They are mortal but possess powers and aptitudes exceeding the customary limits of the mortal condition. Furthermore, a specific property is associated with each door, capable of radically transforming the physical equilibrium of the universe. The custodians are the keepers of these very secrets.

In the Human Universe, the six secret doors that indicate the passage into other universes, those which only madmen dare dream of crossing the threshold, are respectively Mardador, Temper-Ut, Lucioh, Per-Beod, Chonch, and Puerko.

Mardador is the door that was, until most recently, guarded by the bird Ganjez. This door leads from the dense border edges to a light universe, and the mastery of gravity is the secret associated with it.

Temper-Ut leads from the hot border edges to the freezing limits. This door is guarded by Uakl, a tortoise made of mercury, who has the secret to modifying temperatures.

Guarded by Ophidat, a reptilian entity with white and black scales and keeper of the secret to darkness and light, Lucioh is the door that leads from darkness to light. As everyone knows, the Church of the Industrial Saints has a special affinity with this door and its custodian.

Per-Beod is the door which leads from the dry universe to another that is liq-

The Known Universe

What we call the "known" limits of the universe are fixed by the Fringe, this gigantic ethereal beltway that determines the Empire's frontiers. Thus, the space and worlds comprised within the interior of this line is designated as the "Endofringe," while the "Exofringe" consists of all that stretches out beyond this frontier. It is important to note that the Fringe itself is very wide… several hundred light years.

uid. Its guardian, Bemb, holds the key to the absolute source, the secret of mastering water. It seems that one day Bemb, for one reason or another, made an agreement with the Ekonomat, which unifies them in a pact.

Chonch, the door that opens up from a rough and rugged universe to a smooth universe, is guarded by Ruante, who possesses the ability to modify the geographical relief of worlds at will. His power is held by an object, a little brush in orikarb.

Finally, Podrih-Do, the custodian able to act upon the tiniest molecular level, mastering aroma chemistry, watches over Puerko, the door through which one leaves the foul-smelling border edges to emerge into a perfumed universe.

So there are the palpable and tangible aspects of the Human Universe and those bordering it. There is one more point to broach: The universes are cosmo-eaters and are perpetually in competition with one another. Equilibrium among the universes is nothing but a state of instability, the balance of their expansionist forces. Certain of these realities will never be accessible but for those extraordinary beings, who know how to go beyond themselves, pushing their limits in order to force their way to accessing these dimensions. But the reality of the universe, ours and all the others, doesn't stop at the tangible. In fact, there exist alternative truths from other more subtle and better hidden dimensions, or in a word, less perceptible.

The Children of the Void

Accustomed to the endless discovery of creatures one more surprising than the next on the planets of worlds still unknown, humans have also had to adapt to the veritable inhabitants of space.

In the manner of an immeasurable sea, it harbors an unsuspected life and activity. At the furthest point of the borders, where one can just make out the contours of the stellar ice floe, some explorers observed whales, sharks and cetaceans, who resemble the very one who gave the Shabda-Oud such an impressive army of cetacyborgs. It has also been documented that the use of Tri-H bombs and ammunition opened up breaches so deep into space that creatures coming from the interworld could at times manifest themselves, assailing those responsible for these disruptions in the void's equilibrium.

Game Note

If you are playing the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* you can use the fringes of the Human Universe as excellent places to humble even the cockiest of mortals.

The Interworld

In order to give you a more precise idea of the universe's ethereal mysteries, here are the words of a specialist:

"(…) Because the universe, my dear colleagues, isn't like a good old blueberry muffin fresh out of the oven, where the clouds of gas and dust are the dough, and the blueberries are masses scattered here and there — planets, galaxies, and black holes. (…) Whether it be pastry or shortbread, the dough will never resemble the wonderful complexity of the universe's texture, the magical coexistence of the sublime mysteries and physical energy that permits a single, particle of dust to have a greater force than the sum of the cores of all the suns combined. (…)

"(…) No, my dear colleagues, in truth I tell you, the central brain isn't shooting dice… much worse! The central brain is playing liar's poker with the devil, and has bet the entire universe on a miserable two-of-a-kind poker hand."

—Excerpts from the speech given before the Galactic Mentreks Universities' Conference, by the Mentrek Girasol, originator of the Meta-Chaos Theory, in the Terra Prima standard year of 27258.

In spite of the nebulous aspects of this mystery, one statment is clear: The universe is a vast chaotic expanse where "complexity" takes on its full meaning in every sense of the word. And in this bubbling magma hides the interworld, an inaccessible dimension, beyond physical reality as known to humans, and therefore beyond matter as we conceive and perceive it. Although invisible, this patch of the universe is nevertheless a fundamental component of its texture. "A thin, perfectly smooth-surfaced leaf," remark the Mentrek Girasol, "contains more surprises than any spirit of which even the most savage and untamed of paleo-poets could ever have conceived."

Now let's get into the details. Matter is answered with anti-matter, and the cohesion of the heterogeneous universe depends upon the balance between these two fundamental elements. An accident, a cataclysm, or the flapping of a butterfly's wings can alter the alchemy's harmony, opening a gap toward the interworld, "the mythical past-beyond," the essential fabric of the Human Universe. This dimension of chaos and beauty houses scenes of splendor and dread to which no soul would know how to resist: the chaotic Amber Zone, from which perhaps came life, seeing that harmony is born of disorder. Then beyond the labyrinthine passages, the original dimension, as so aptly put by Girasol: "a dimension of pure beauty and eternal calm, where on their own, the living lights undulate, shiver, radiate, glisten, shine forth, phosphor, sparkle, and glitter, such are these jewels large as galaxies." And further still, further than any distance ever traveled is the Omphal, "the first and last spot, the secret navel where all is created, and all is consumed."

What is learned from these revelations? In fact, the essential idea is that somewhere there exists the ultimate point of matter's existence. It is the mythical Omphal, the point of origin of the big bang. At the origin of the world and all things, the totality of colossal quantities of infinite and unimaginable energy, which goes through creat-

ing and shaping the universe, was contained in a miniscule point, a tiny black sphere, shiny like a pupil: the eye creator, the one who gives birth to all worlds. This point, the first and the last, buried within the deepest fabric of the universe, from which one day appeared all that exists, could also sound the end of all existence.

Actually, what would come to pass if the eye creator came to close up again? If an ultrapowerful and heroic madman came to brave one thousand dangers in order to pierce the iris of the first eye?

Effectively, the question is asked, but rare are those who have dared venture to the other side. Only two representatives of the august line of Metawarriors, the Metabaron Aghnar and the Metabaron Steelhead, are known to have ever crossed this boundary. Because the interworld is protected. At its breast are nurtured creatures more dreadful than famished ghouls, more monstrous than depraved nosferastriges, more deadly than the most powerful of fish. In particular, strange vampires haunt this zone, mind-eaters who scoff at the most resistant of white Netranekkon reinforcements and who gorge on the mouth-watering cephalic mass bedded in human skulls.

Thus, there is little risk that a mortal dare go defy the Omphal. But one never knows…

Hyperspace and Interspace

Mastering hyperspace had been the initial key to the conquest of Terra Prima's galaxy. Hyperspace is an unstable state of the intersidereal void, in which all bodies launched faster than the speed of light enter. It has already been a long time, more than 27,000 years, since humans mastered their traveling speed in space and left to conquer this exquisitely mortal new frontier. The universe was finally stretching out its arms to them. It is the discovery of the instant fusion-contraction-dilation of principle matter that offered this immeasurable power, able to propel them into the supraluminous dimension. But the mastery of this power was a long, treacherous road scattered with traps boundless dangers. At the time of the very first attempts, a number of vessels, exiting a jump, materialized within the interior of planets or stars, exploding instantaneously. But time has gone by and now entire zones of the universe, faraway galaxies and constellations, have been mapped, and today the hyperspace highways are taken without risk. Furthermore, even better quality soundings, elaborated in the Techno-Technos' secret laboratory-factories, allow the identification of exit access point areas.

Along with the intersidereal tunnels, hyperspace is today one of the principle means of voyage in space. The first allow travel to phenomenal distances, barely imaginable, between galaxies, sometimes thousands of light years away from one another; and the second is the route taken by vessels within a system or galaxy of small dimension, or when vessels travel within zones which are not served by intersidereal tunnels. Perfectly mastered today, hyperspace no longer presents any danger, just a few inconveniences. For example, the length of hyperspace voyages is wasted time consecrated to nothing else but an artificially deep sleep. This means of travel is therefore not recommended for long distances where one could easily see a standard year pass by in vain. However, hyperspace can present an undeniable interest to those persons who find themselves in a delicate situation with the authorities, or pursued by a pack of pirate ships, because in theory, it is technically impossible to follow the trace of a vessel immersed in hyperspace.

But there exists yet another way to travel, through another dimension of space. A secret and dangerous course, almost unknown and certainly fantastic, solely accessible to representatives of the Metabaron cast: the interspace.

Launched at full engine power, the Metacraft slices through anti-matter, the negative counterpart of matter, and penetrates the interspace. In this mysterious zone, unknown to the rest of humans, the Metacraft can in a few standard seconds traverse thousands of light years and pass from the Trogosocialik system to the Techno-Technos' Central Planet. A trip that would take a normal vessel several weeks in hyperspace,only lasts a heart beat for the Metacraft. In a single leap, an infinitesimal fraction on the scale of the universe, almost as if gifted with ubiquity, it can spring up at any point in space, scoffing at protection shields, supraradar, and electrospies. This unique ability imparts a formidable power to the Metacraft, which completely erases the hopes of impregnability to any so-called unassailable fortress.

To explain how the Metabaron proceeds into interspace, here is the first of many secrets concerning the Metacraft. The Metabaron's fantastic vessel is not only a magnificently slender and ultra powerfully armed instrument of death. It is much more than that. The craft is an integral part of the Castaka's soul, the feminine alter-ego of Ganjez, the spirit of Marmola. Just as at the moment of his death, the male bird, guardian of epiphyte, merged into the soul of the first Metabaron, the female bird, condemned to unbearable solitude, united with the Metacraft. Thus this unique combat vessel's absolutely stupefying powers came in great part from this unification.

Organizing the Worlds

In a universe too vast for it to be possible for anyone to claim having explored all its most infinite parts, habitable planets and worlds are organized into a hierarchy based on travel time, rather than according to their true importance. Worlds at the Exofringes have the particularity of being situated beyond the Empire's limits, just like the border worlds, but the existence of some doors beyond the Imperial frontiers equally create a notion of major and minor worlds of the Exofringe.

What is interspace? In fact, it is devoid of matter, a state beyond matter or anti-matter, the ultimate form of nothingness, which is much like being behind the scenes of reality. Time and space are obliterated, and nothing can exist. That is, nothing except one's conscious, which is the only medium capable of maintaining a being's cohesion. Vested with an immeasurable strength drawn from the deepest of primal sexual energies, combined with the seventh fundamental force — the cosmo-carnal interaction — the Metabaron and the Metacraft are capable of crystallizing the essence of their consciousness. At the entrance to interspace, their material reality dissolves, but its memory is preserved in a nucleus of superior strength. The given exertion is colossal, and only their superhuman willpower allows them to sustain it. An infinite fraction of standard time later, which represents an eternity in Gehenna to them, their materialization is restored at the targeted point of arrival.

That's how the Metabaron frees himself from the constraints of time and space, and fulfills the quasi-divine dream of ubiquity.

Flotsam and Jetsam Collectors

The successive wars and expeditions in space have not only contributed to the discovery of new horizons, but also have generated some surprising activities. Just as the seas have their pirates, in space there exist wreckage collectors. Not just satisfied with plundering the carcasses of drifting vessels, they voluntarily provoke damages and breakdowns, before melting down the cabin in order to seize the material and spare parts. For those who get near them, they give off a smell that evokes rusted metal. Considered as the worst riddle of the universe, the pirates have counted in their ranks the illustrious Othon, who debuted his career with them before being snatched up into the whirlwind of his destiny with the Castakas.

Tunnels and Worlds

Since the invention of the Techno-Tunnels, worlds are differentiated based on their location:the "major" worlds — situated at less than five hours by hyper-spatial jump from a Tunnel door; the "minor" worlds — accessible in less than five days after a jump; and the "faraway" worlds — situated at more than five days from a hyperspatial exit point.

The Human and Alien Galaxies

The universe is certainly finite, but as far as they've traveled, humans still haven't seen it all. The Milky Way alone, Terra Prima's galaxy, is an enormous disc of stars 100,000 light years in diameter and 3,000 light years in depth, containing some 200 billion stars floating in interstellar matter made up of dust and plasma. Its central bulb, 18 million light years in diameter, is completed by four spiral arms. This sidereal space harbors no more than two black holes.

At this galaxy's periphery, a small star — the sun — sends its heat and light to Terra Prima. In total, nine planets and their satellites, some thousands of asteroids and several hundreds of comets form Terra Prima's solar system, which is just one of numerous systems composed around a good part of the 200 billion stars in the Milky Way Galaxy.

Further out, the universe houses other galaxies by the billions, a myriad of stars and planets in unimaginable quantities. The galaxies are so numerous that they organize themselves in clusters. And then in clusters of clusters. And then in super-clusters. Set in equilibrium in the void, their arrangement reminds one of cellulose molecules found in plant tissue. On occasion, the clusters even regroup into hyperclusters, whose weight is such that they attract entire galaxies. Whirlwinds form, and the universe becomes agitated, shaking about. Head-on collisions take place creating "cosmic tsunamis," which spread in the universe at the speed of 320,000 kilometers per hour and give birth to billions of stars.

It is in this perpetually agitated stellar confusion that the Human Empire, originally set off from Terra Prima, pursues its expansion. Today, the census of the universe shows 22,000 major worlds, of which almost half are Endocities — the famous planets terraformed with care by the Magnarmada Techno-Amazona vessels. Concretely, all these major worlds are just as well-isolated planets as complete systems or even galaxies. Everything depends upon the particular configuration of the concerned spatial zone. In any case, these worlds are exceptionally distant from one another, are profoundly different from each other (with the exception of the Endocities, which instead have the tendency to resemble one another), and are governed by laws, customs, habits, and extremely varied authorities, even if they have all been inspired, specified, or nominated by the Empire.

The next chapter covers a sampling of planets and worlds over which the Emperoress, Janus-Jana, extends His-Her authority. Some will already be familiar, but others will surely seem much more exotic.

WORLDS

Besides the few quickly presented planets in this chapter, the universe contains billions of other worlds, in astronomical quantities, quasi-infinite numbers of celestial bodies, stars, and mysteries. Freed from the stellar ice floes, ice asteroids roam thus in the sidereal void, wherever the stellar winds take them. Furthermore, human races in myriads, mutants, and extraterrestrials who populate the universe never stopped fashioning their world and constructing new ones. There is also Dreer, Summit, Aquaend, Alix III Badmech, Barnab Laylin, Del Rey III, and still many other worlds, not to mention the orbiting stations. In this way, terraformed planets came into being everywhere humans went, and strings of artificial satellites have been scattered.

But the Universe also conceals incomprehensible traps that are still beyond comprehension. This explains the "No Return Pass," a bottleneck alley where inevitably lost crafts founder. These narrows would be, it is said, the mythic hideout of the "arachno-bats," improbable creatures the size of a very small planet or a large asteroid. These creatures apparently live in the sidereal void, and survive thanks to the photonic radiation harnessed by their gigantic wings, comparable to stellar sails. To make things a bit more appetizing, they spin webs between their mother planet and its five satellites, where imprudent ships and vessels come and get trapped.

And that is the setting of this universe — a magnificet backdrop, where even the glacial cold of the infinite void conceals a certain poetry.

OVERVIEW NOTE

In the "Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel" section of each planet's overview chart, the value indicates time expressed in days (d) or hours (h) necessary to reach an interstellar (t) or an intergalactic (T) Techno-Tunnel.

MARMOLA

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Distant World
Climate: Temperate
Day Length: 22 standard hours
Year Length: 412 local days
Government: Imperial governor
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Dry
Major Exports: Ephiphyte and mined products (marble)
Major Imports: Technological Equipment
Planet's Function: Vast industrial and research center
Population: 65 million inhabitants
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 15dt
Spaceport: Stellar class
Technology: Space
Terrain: Barren stretches, mountains, a fertile valley
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Piedra
Star System: Philidor, situated at the periphery of one of the galaxy's spiral arms.

Physical Characteristics: Third planet in the Philidor system, with a diameter of 158,000 kilometers, Marmola completes a single revolution on its axis in slightly under 22 standard hours, and completes its orbit in 412 standard days. Its rotation axis lies off center at 15°23' with respect to an ecliptic plane, which allows the phenomenon of seasons to be known. Marmola's sole fertile valley is located in the temperate zone. There are cold and hot seasons, separated by two short intermediary periods. Considering the particular properties of its core, its gravity represents 0.9568 times that of Terra Prima's, despite the difference in mass. Its relatively even land surface is traversed by two vast, north-south oriented mountain chains, reaching 15,000 meters at its highest point. Rich in oxygen, its atmosphere shows traces of nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and other various gases.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 55xyz33

Satellites: Marmola does not have any satellites.

Flora and Fauna: Excepting a miniscule valley bathed by a slender stream, the surface of Marmola is completely arid. A meager vegetation grows in the valley where some rare animal species also live. History tells us that formerly a great bird lived there, spreading its enormous wings to hover above for great lengths of time.

Marmola is a gigantic globe of marble. Despite the presence of an atmosphere, life is extremely difficult on its arid surface. There is only one miniscule fertile valley in which all of the rare human inhabitants were settled.

Marmola draws it sustenance from its earth, which is extracted in order to pave the Empire's palace floors and walls.

The heart of the stone sphere harbors a treasure — epyphite, the sacred blood of the marble planet which became the greatest treasure of the Empire and was the object of a bitter battle.

The proud marble ball — whose variegated reflections softly colored the entirety of the Philidor system — is now nothing more than a scraggy stump gnawed to the bone. Marmola's splendid light no longer shines under its orbiting space stations. It's only fertile valley has long since been filled in with stones and other rocky ejections.

The Imperial technicians have been forced to live in space — a consequence of the meticulous carving up of the planet. As the epiphyte was pumped out, Marmola shriveled up, completely aspirated from the inside. Overexploitation was the cause of a slow, agonizing death to this otherwise legendary world….

Today, Marmola is covered in Imperial extraction installations, designed to remove marble and the precious (and rapidly depleting) epyphite.

Population: From time immemorial, the Cataska clan lived on this planet to which they were bound by the powerful yet subtle link of a magic essence. The head of the clan's soul has been inhabited by the keeper's spirit, Ganjez, since the days of Dayal von Castaka, the founder of the glorious line.

"Emergency! The rebellion is spreading! Repeat: Rebellion is spreading. Rioting has taken over three additional cities. All communications with the Techno-Technos' tropical systems servo-relay have been interrupted — but a live direct transmission to the hypertele transmitters has been localized… transmitting out to 22,000 major worlds of the Empire!" — Imperial communication, code alert

Golden Planet

Aliens: None

Atmosphere: Type I (breathable) pure oxygen

Category: Major World

Climate: Temperate

Day Length: 25 standard hours

Year Length: 213 local days

Government: Emperoress and the Imperial government

Gravity: Standard

Hydrosphere: Dry

Major Exports: Galactic bureaucracy

Major Imports: Luxury products, foodstuffs, high-technology products

Planet's Function: Capital of the Human Empire

Population: 5 million inhabitants

Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 1ht

Spaceport: Ist Class and first in the Imperial Class

Technology: Space

Terrain: Pure Gold

Type: Terrestrial

Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy

Constellation: Alba

Star System: Oro

Physical Characteristics: The Golden Planet is the most voluminous of the three planets (Beacon Planet and Forbidden Planet are the two others) that make up the tiny Oro system. Originally the planet was octagonal, but it was remodeled by the Empire. At a distance of 153.7 million kilometers from its sun, the star Alba, it follows a very eccentric orbit, in 213 standard days, strongly tilted at 10° on the ecliptic plane. Despite physical conditions that are in theory favorable to life (presence of a thin atmospheric layer), there existed practically no animal or vege-table life at humanity's arrival on Golden Planet, without a doubt due to the considerable differences in temperature at its surface. Its diameter (47,230 kilometers) and its gravity are comparable to Terra Prima's. An equatorial plane, 300 kilometers wide, enjoys the privilege of an optimal exposition to the solar rays. Its natural relief is barely pronounced. A comparatively dense water network is concentrated in the equatorial zone. The planet's metallic core is a colossal mass of pure gold. Rich veins of gold rise up to the surface directly from the heart of the planet.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 23oro78

Satellites: Golden Planet has ten satellites, one natural and nine artificial, on which defense systems are installed (polyradars, quantum sensors, photonic shields). Their position in space assures perfect coverage of Golden Planet's entire surface. The small natural satellite has been redeveloped into a vacation and recreational resort, where grand celebrations and other social events are organized. It now provides a habitat for synthetic flora and fauna, colored uniformly in the crimson-purple palette, from vivid magenta to deep eggplant blue.

Flora and Fauna: Only two types of animal and plant life were encountered on the first human expedition to Golden Planet and solely in the equatorial zone: enormous trees with wide palm leaves, veined in gold, and jumping insects equipped with extremely powerful hind feet capable of making tremendous leaps (10,780 times their height). At death, these plants and animals do not undergo the biodegradation process, as do most types of bacteria. Instead, they dry up to the point of becoming a pure gold skeletal residue, which then integrates itself into the ground.

Since the Empire's settling into this world, Amorine is found in the gardens and balconies of the highest leaders' residences. The Amourine flower, which feeds on the planet's gold, grows in abundance. But nobody takes care of the Amourine, because the flower is taboo, and no hand subject to Imperial will would commit the sacrilege of touching it, even with a gentle caress. Consequently, the Amourine flowers, needlessly in bloom on the balconies of the Empire's nobility, become sad, and at nightfall, a muted lament rustles throughout the streets and alleys of Golden Planet.

Population: Originally, Golden Planet had no endogenous population of any human type. Today this planet is the political, military, and religious seat of the Empire, and its population reaches five billion individuals. The demographics are stable, births compensating deaths, and immigration is under excessive control. Besides the Imperial Court, the Golden Planet equally welcomes official representatives from parallel universes, and it is in the offices of the Confederation of Parallel Universes that the polyuniversal teleconferences are televised.

Additional Information: After the discovery of Golden Planet and its riches, a short period of trouble abounded in this area of the cosmos, until the Empire decided to settle here and make the planet its headquarters. The entire surface had been leveled, with the exception of hillocks and mounds situated at the highest point of the equatorial plane (situated precisely on the equator) where the Imperial Palace was built. At ground level, an uninterrupted succession of golden cities cover the entirety of the planet's surface. An artificial atmosphere of pure oxy-

gen has been created. Exterior life is possible in the equatorial zone. In other regions, life is underground.

Terra Prima

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type II (breather unit recommended)
Category: Major World
Climate: Temperate
Day Length: 24 standard hours
Year Length: 365 local days (standard)
Government: N/A
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Humid
Major Exports: None
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: None
Population: Postapocolyptic mutants (uncounted)
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 5ht
Spaceport: None
Technology: None
Terrain: Plains, mountains, glacial zones, oceans
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Alpha Centauri
Star System: Sol, extending around the sun as far as the Oort Cloud.

Physical Characteristics: Third planet from the sun, situated at a distance varying between 147.1 and 152.1 million kilometers from the sun (due to its eccentric orbit), Terra Prima completes its orbit in 365 days, 6 hours, 9 minutes, and 9.5 seconds. It rotates on its axis in 23 hours, 56 minutes and 4.1 seconds. On January, 2000, of Terra Prima's human paleo-calender, the axis was inclined on the terrestrial orbit at an angle of 23°26' and 21.4". Endowed with an atmosphere rich in oxygen and hydrogen, and expanses of water on over two thirds of its surface, this sphere of 40,000 kilometers in diameter is the cradle of human life. All of the human races which populate the universe to this day are prior offspring of Terra Prima's original human race.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 12zbd49

Satellites: Originally, Terra Prima had one satellite, the moon, which is completely destoryed today.

Flora and Fauna: At life's beginnings, Terra Prima provided a habitat for extraordinarily luxurious flora and fauna, to this day unparalleled on any blue planet visited in the universe. With the development of the human race, the biological diversity of Terra Prima degenerated to the sad state of being nothing more than a souvenir in the memory of only the best-informed Mentreks. After the flora and fauna's wild species became extinct, human life itself became impossible on this planet. Today, Terra Prima is nothing but a field of poisoned ruins, bathed in a radioactive atmosphere.

Population: Formerly inhabited by more than 120 billion human individuals, Terra Prima no longer counts a single habitant.

Additional Information: Once the seat of the Empire and the human galaxy's central planet, Terra Prima suffered a slow and painful death after the departure of the Imperial authorities for Golden Planet. The populations left behind headed an arsenal of massive destruction, and lacking any unifying power, rival factions confronted each other for control of the vacant Imperial throne.

There was a time when the fear of seeing fission's all-consuming fire explode into a rage that would have inevitably wiped Terra Prima along with the entire galaxy off the maps of the cosmos could rein in humanity's destructive madness. But fear was also the excuse they were waiting for to elaborate even more destructive weapons. There was an escalation of biological and chemical warfare, answered with their neutronic, protonic, and photonic counterparts. And so it was at this time that the machines launched their sacred war against humans and all biological elements. The tiniest sign of life, even the most subterranean, buried away and best protected, had been annihilated. The human race then left its nourishing mother planet without a glance, scattering out into the entire cosmos. Today, on the desolate landscape of proud constructions once built to reach the high heavens, blows an acid wind deprived of the tiniest song or even the slightest sound.

Of the countless billions of the Blue Planet's inhabitants, a destructive frenzy chased away the great majority and decimated the rest. Only a few zombie-mutants remain today, wandering in the debris, feeding on organic moss and drinking from the acid pools. For these ectoplasms of concentrated hate, all that remains of their distant humanity is the desire for revenge, a deeply anchored feeling that pushes them to spontaneously detest all others but themselves. Adventurous voyagers must never forget the risk they run in visiting this planet, notably that of falling prey to these cannibalistic creatures who would adore having the chance to devour their hearts….

Okhar and the Anasirma Asteroid

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Minor World
Climate: Temperate
Day Length: undetermined
Year Length: undetermined
Government: None
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Humid
Major Exports: None
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: Metabaron's secret hideout
Population: The Metabaron
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 3dt
Spaceport: None
Technology: Meta-technology
Terrain: Mountains
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Diamond
Star System: Ankharo

Physical Characteristics: Ankharo is a small star comparatively far out in the galaxy. The Ankharo system is composed of four planets, of which three are barren. In contrast, Okhar is an exceptionally fertile world, a veritable haven of extraordinary conditions. Smaller than Terra Prima (32,750 kilometers in diameter), Okhar has an atmosphere rich in oxygen and other gases (notably dioxygen, ozone and carbon dioxide). Moderately inclined on its ecliptic axis, it has faintly defined seasons. However, the climate varies depending upon latitude. A wide equatorial plane registers a hot and humid climate. Vast temperate zones with a pleasant paleo-Mediterranean-style climate extend northward and southward from this area. Two immense continental plateaus, separated by two oceans, cover the whole of the sphere. The geographical relief is varied: Plentifully irrigated plains give way to wooded massifs. The north, which is the more vast of the continents is blocked off by the Anasirma, an imposing chain of sacred mountains. Okhar completes its orbit in 425 days. It rotates on its axis in 27 hours, 12 minutes.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 27hok78

Satellites: Okhar has two natural moons, Orkho and Rahna, diametrically opposed and vertically situated at the planet's two poles.

Flora and Fauna: The extremely favorable and varied conditions of the planet have allowed for the appearance of flora and fauna that is as rich as it is exuberant. Topping the long list of luxurious plants are the carnivores with their intoxicating perfume, the huge ferns of the Anasima foothills, the namioc (whose edible root forms the base of the Okharian people's diet), and the giant smooth-trunked soquaia (whose tops extend upwards for hundreds of meters). The animal kingdom isn't idle: a fantastic life bustles about in the swamps and marshes, such as the delicious, fragrantly fleshed zapopos with their poisonous skin, or the blue-shelled crabawfish. On land, the venomous scolopedes slither, and the gigantic-eared konojos gallop alongside the jumping guanacuñas. In the air, fly winged cats and carnivorous eodactyles — fearsome winged creatures with formidable jaws.

Population: Peaceful human tribes, who call themselves the Canus, people the fertile valleys. Their gentle temperament is in perfect harmony with the clement life on Okhar. By tradition and inclination, they profess a confident submission to the immanent providence, and are apt to faithfully serve the master of Okhar.

Additional Information: The Empire offered planet Okhar, a new and protected world, to Othon von Castaka, the first Metabaron, to thank him for services rendered to the Empire. It is here that Othon made Honorata's acquaintance and that Aghnar was born. And life could have gone by peacefully, but Okhar was bound to know a destiny as tragic as that of the glorious line of Metawarriors. Victim of the Shabda-Oud's implacable tracking, Okhar was devastated by the explosion of micro-H bombs implanted in Honorata's chest by her Shabda-Oud superiors. Everything was destroyed. The pacific Okharian tribes were erased from humanity's memory, and the flora and fauna were engulfed in the explosion. However, the secret Castaka retreat, buried deep in the heart of the Anasirma mountain chain, was conserved within the core of an asteroid propelled intact into space during the explosion.

Since the time of Okhar's destruction, the Anasirma Asteroid hides the Castaka's impregnable fortress. In the heart of this sanctuary, guarded by an army of ferocious eodactyles, the wonders of the ancient maxiprotonic tower sleep an eternal sleep sur-rounded by the Metabaron's weapons and souvenirs. Much like Tonto in the Metabunker, a procession of robots assures the fortress's upkeep and maintenance, accompanied only by the hissing silence of their well-oiled cogwheels. The whereabouts of this ultimate refuge are solely known to the Metabaron, accessible to him alone, and it is here that he finds refuge from the universe's din, freely giving himself over to melancholy….

Hospital Planet

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Major World
Climate: Glacial
Day Length: 48 standard hours
Year Length: 480 local days
Government: Techno-Pope
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Humid
Major Exports: Organs, biological tissue, health and medical information
Major Imports: The sick, dying, bacteria, germs, and tourists
Planet's Function: The Empire's hospital base
Population: 6.5 billion
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 2ht
Spaceport: Ist class
Technology: Space
Terrain: Plateaux, mountains, plains
Type: Terresterial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's Galaxy
Constellation: Central
Star System: Shaar

Physical Characteristics: A gigantic planet from the Shaar system that counts seven in all, Hospital Planet is an immaculate white sphere entirely reworked by humans. Two soft-water oceans are fixed at the poles. They meet the needs of this colossal healthcare establishment. The median strip is an immense, sprawling construction that culminates at a high point averaging 4,700 meters. Perfectly centered on its ecliptic, Hospital Planet doesn't experience the phenomenon of seasons. The scrawny rays of its sun only produce a pale light. Hospital Planet completes its orbit in 480 days and rotates on its axis in 48 hours. The surface temperature is always negative, varying between –6° and –278°C, which

provides perfect conditions for conserving organs and chemicals without cluttering the installations. Hospital Planet's atmosphere is rich in oxygen, but one also finds a number of other gases and compounds in gas form (alcohol, either, chloroform, etc.). Even traces of alkaloid gas residue have been detected.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 17sos18

Satellites: Two satellites revolve around Hospital Planet: Arton and Nituh.

Flora and Fauna: There is no endemic natural vegetation, nor any trace of animal life. Today, gigantic hydroponic greenhouses permit a local production of plants and flowers. In the same way, there are immense subterranean and surface installations including a cancerous cell zoo, a park where all the viral strains ever encountered in space frolic about in liberty, a giant Kock's bacillus, dancing bacteria, polychromatic mutant cysts, and a thousand other wonders that are well worth the visit.

Population: No indigenous population lives on Hospital Planet. Today several billion people, for the most part dressed in white, live on the planet.

Additional Information: Hospital Planet is the human galaxy's healthcare institution. Its centrally located position allows for the treatment of numerous clientele. Apart from the services of multispecialized surgery, general healthcare, rehabilitation and treatment research centers, prosthesis centers, morgues, hotel networks, and annexes allotted to supplies and management, Hospital Planet equally accommodates several research centers. It is the Hospital Planet team of researchers who in thirty years, ten days, five hours, eight seconds, seven tenths, and twelve hundredths successfully inseminated an egg from the Empress with a sterile sperm from the Emperor to create Janus-Jana, he and she twins who would later become the master/mistress of the galaxy, its "Major Ophidity," the Emperoress of all things.

The omni-practitioners training is completely under the authority of the Techno-Technos. The surgeons cast constitutes a veritable sect, particularly fierce, who believe as their motto affirms: "better to cut than heal." In practice, all of the surgeons are laden with machines that are systematically implanted during their training period. At the same time, a huge production unit manufactures hordes of robo-surgeons, including one who has known an extraordinary destiny. This is Tonto, the Metabaron's faithful robot, who was actually issued from Hospital Planet's production lines. The meeting between Tonto and the first Metabaron happened when Othon came to have the legs of his son Bari treated after the battle of Marmola. Refusing to submit to the humiliation of being forced to wait, Othon, half crazed by grief and the affront to his pride, grabbed hold of a robo-surgeon set on a cart. The robot was Tonto, a prototype marked for destruction because he showed some disturbing signs of completely unpredictable robotic mutations. Endowed with phenomenal super-intelligence and a quasiconscious, Tonto immediately took a liking to this weeping warrior who was reducing half of the building to ashes, and showed him how to escape without danger. Since this time, Tonto has been in service to the Metabarons.

In the underground levels of Hospital Planet, the nursing staff, bios and robots alike, regularly renew the time-honored tradition of Terra Prima's paleo-medical students. In an infernal bacchanal feast, they revive the "Burial Celebration." During these unbridled orgies, they take out and dress the cada-vers, tease the dying patients, and get carried away with pranks in-spired by the hyperpowerful drugs they have consumed.

Perdita

Aliens: Magons
Atmosphere: Type IV (exoskeleten required)
Category: Exofringe World
Climate: Tropical
Day Length: 134 standard hours
Year Length: 42 local days
Government: Tribal
Gravity: Supraheavy
Hydrosphere: Saturated
Major Exports: None
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: None
Population: Tens of thousands of specimens
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 24dt
Spaceport: None
Technology: Stone
Terrain: Plains, mushrooms
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's Galaxy
Constellation: Canis Minor
Star System: Inferior

Physical Characteristics: Planet Perdita is a sphere of modest dimensions (a diameter of 23,500 kilometers) which rotates on its axis in a bit more than 134 standard hours and completes its orbit in 42 standard days. Taking into consideration its off-centered axis compared to its ecliptic plane (13.7°), it experiences a barely defined phenomenon of seasons, which however follow one another very rapidly. Perdita is endowed with an enormous metallic core (Magonium48, an extremely heavy metal without any particular properties or industrial applicability, which permitted Perdita to be saved from the Ekonomat's tradesmen's greed). The ground gravity is absolutely phenomenal (more than 1,000 times that of Terra Prima). The atmosphere is an unstable mixture of oxygen, hydrogen, and heavy gases, which crystallize to form a misty gangue encircling a small ball of granite and mud. On the ground, water is omnipresent and the temperature is relatively elevated.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 48fin18

Satellites: Perdita has one asteroid satellite, Hongo.

Flora and Fauna: With both favorable physical and climatic conditions (presence of water, positive tempera-

tures and oxygen), an animal and plant life has naturally developed on this world. Thus, on Perdita's surface, gigantic mushrooms grow 50 meters high in a compost extraordinarily favorable to the proliferation of mycotic spores. At the top of these fungoid structures live the Magon tribe, large mycophagous monkeys, insensible to gravity, who float in the air and feed on bark torn from the mushroom trunks. On the ground, masses of flat and carnivorous creatures crushed by the gravity mill about, feeding on the fallen great monkeys. It so happens that due to a whimsical and uncertain logic, the flying monkeys suddenly regain their weight and go crashing to the ground. This happens regularly at the change of each season, the day the Red Light returns, during which the Magons grow fangs and confront each other in bloody battles to win the title of Patriarch. As well as being extremely prolific, the Magon monkeys have a longevity of 30,000 standard years. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Magons are great salt eaters, which explains their absolute fascination with Planet Diamond. In fact, Planet Diamond is a fragment snatched from the stellar ice floe, which itself is an agglomeration of salt, and the first Magon certainly originated from the stellar ice floe.

It's not a good idea to hang out near the outskirts of Perdita. Its tremendous gravity creates a turbulent field that is felt for light years around. Voyageurs caught in this gravitational vortex have practically no chance of escaping a tragic end, stuck on this hostile planet for eternity. Nevertheless, there is a persistent rumor that evokes the case of a wise explorer who apparently was able to successfully overcome the planet's implacable attraction in utilizing a substance contained in the Magons' laryngeal glands. And as if that weren't enough, he also discovered a Magonium48 oxide containing astounding properties…

Population: There is no human population on Perdita.

Additional Information: Turned into a refuge for the Castakas after the destruction of Okhar, Perdita is the world where the Metabaron Othon died, killed in the Metabaron tradition by his son Aghnar. Left alone at only eight years old, Aghnar grew up in this unfriendly world. Ten years later, he left Perdita after having become the Master of the Magons, who vowed to him their boundless fidelity. He then sacrificed them in order to satisfy his desire for vengeance against the Shabda-Oud order. Today, the Magons no longer fall from the sky to be devoured by the flat creatures, and Perdita has returned to its foggy solitude.

Stellar Ice Floe

Aliens: Jejohs and other creatures of the glacial borders
Atmosphere: Type IV (exoskeleton required)
Category: World of the Confines
Climate: Glacial
Day Length: Undetermined
Year Length: Undetermined
Government: None
Gravity: Heavy
Hydrosphere: Saturated
Major Exports: None
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: None
Population: Undetermined
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 16dt
Spaceport: None
Technology: Stone
Terrain: Ice floe
Type: Asteroid
Galaxy: Icy
Constellation: Glacial confines
Star System: Hielo

Physical Characteristics: Hielo is a neutron star resulting from the explosion of a supernova. This miniscule aster (with a radius of barely ten kilometers) presents an average density on the order of 1,000 million tons per cubic centimeter, which has the effect of making the area extremely unstable. The enormous force of gravity is felt from light years away in every direction, and the system's cohesion is constantly at risk of being upset. This system counts four planets. The first is a giant planet (one million kilometers in diameter) that maintains its equilibrium due to its phenomenal mass. Consequently, it forms a screen that deviates the intense photonic radiance of Hielo and projects a vast cone of shadow over the rest of the system. The next three planets are therefore plunged into an absolute stellar darkness where glacial temperatures reign at well below absolute zero. The stellar ice floe extends for a distance of close to two light years over three planets. It was formed by the agglomerations of salty debris and brackish and watery products coming from the explosion of a vast system of aquatic planets. No atmosphere encircles the ice floe, but the stellar winds, which frequently fly into a rage there, are loaded with oxygen and hydrogen. Moreover, powerful photonic currents circle the immediate edges around the cone of shadow.

The stellar ice floe is not a completely quiet zone and it is not as barren as one may think. For example, it served as a refuge for creatures of the extreme confines — the Jejohs, who escaped the tyranny of the pachydermic jellyfish. After diverse phases of mutation in order to adapt to the particular conditions of the ice floe, the Jejohs ended up liking it there, all the more so because they discovered the virtues of Piram — a cactus plant that grows on the ice floe and whose sap increases mental power tenfold. But the awakening of one's consciousness doesn't happen without producing unexpected side effects. When united, the Jejohs entered into a phase of violent conflict. It is at this period that the Techno Popess, herself in open war with the Techno-Pope, set out to establish her own order and discovered the stellar ice floe. Until then, the rare vessels that came to the out-skirts had undergone massive structural cor-rosion, and rarer still, those few explorers, who had tread upon the ice floe's ground, had had their eyeballs irremediably dam-aged by

the salt. But the cetacyborgs laugh at the corrosion (in fact, they are mad about salty biological debris), and the Shabda-Oud have a mental carapace that protects them against all forms of aggression. In this way, the Shabda-Oud priestess, during her exploration of the planet, rescued an injured Jejoh. Won over by its powerful male lust, she decided to make him the order's official inseminator.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 27hdo12

Satellites: No actual satellites have been recorded, but vast frozen star clusters sometimes break away from the ice floe. The asteroid-icebergs drift wherever they are taken by the stellar winds.

Flora and Fauna: No living flora exists in this zone, but quantities of plant debris are trapped in the ice. Krill beds and stellar micro-plankton, made up of small salted vampires, which the cetacyborgs delight in, can also sometimes be found fro-zen within these glacial monstrosities. Enor-mous cetacreatures come to roam this zone, especially during their reproductive period, and some navigator-explorer accounts report the sighting of titanic yet slender creatures, similar to stellar skate fish, playing on the outskirts of the floe.

Population: No living population inhabits the stellar ice floe. However, the icebergs contain a myriad of various beings originating from worlds that were snatched up and frozen. In particular, there is a Jejoh colony, fellow creatures of the one who became the Shabda-Oud order's god. The nun-sluts built a temple on the stellar ice, even more dazzling than the one on Planet Diamond. But only the most deserving knew of its existence and had the honor of going to visit it. This first temple is today in ruins.

"In my austere palace,
I ruminate in silence,
and one day my sisters will assuage my desire for vengeance."
Cloistered on the ice asteroid where the only thing more glacial than the cold is the numbness reigning in her heart, Argatha — first and last Shabda-Oud priestess — meditates and waits.

Baggdathi-the-Pearl

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Major World
Climate: Temperate
Day Length: 19 standard hours
Year Length: 225 local days
Government: Anarcho-monarchical
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Major Exports: Luxury products, some raw materials (Kankrum25)
Major Imports: Eclectics
Planet's Function: Capital of the Septenarian system, trafficking
Population: 1.6 billion
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 3ht
Spaceport: Standard Class
Technology: Computer
Terrain: Tropical forests, mountain chains, plains
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Goathi
Star System: Septenarian, neighboring the Beta-Kuntri blue-solar system

Physical Characteristics: Set in the septenarian system, Baggdathi-the-Pearl is the largest of seven planets contained in the system. Underground, it contains incredible quantities of Kankrum25, a radioactive element indispensable to the Hospital Planet laboratories for the development of certain anti-metastatic products. A vast globe of 54,000 kilometers in diameter, Baggdathi-the-Pearl is a blue planet with characteristics comparable to that of Terra Prima. It is divided into seven continents by six oceans. Its atmosphere is rich in oxygen, hydrogen, and ozone. With an inclination on the ecliptic plane of 8.74°, it has in its temperate zones four distinct seasons. In the equatorial zones, there are only two seasons: a dry season and a rainy season. Baggdathi-the-Pearl completes its orbit in 225 days and makes a single revolution on its axis in a bit more than 19 hours.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 85oda43

Satellites: A chain of 17 satellites form a necklace around Baggdathi-the-Pearl.

Flora and Fauna: Benefiting from conditions favorable to the propagation of animal and plant life, Baggdathi-the-Pearl is gifted with rich and diverse flora and fauna. Numerous species remind one of those found on Terra Prima, but the endemic life has proved itself to have an unbridled imagination.

Population: Due to remote offspring of Terra Prima's fathers who came to conquer the universe, the population of Baggdathi-the-Pearl is essentially human. As a commercial crossroads, however, this world welcomes representatives of numerous extra terrestrial races as well.

Additional Information: A not so very long time ago, Baggdathi-the-Pearl was an incredible garden, a fantastic park full of attractions. There was nothing but toys and robots galore, a carousel of multicolored trinkets and fireworks. The father of Oda the Capricious, sovereign of this world, reigned from his palace in the royal city of Amahdis, over a colossal fortune that was cheerfully consecrated to realizing his infantile fantasies. Further-

After a long period of upheavals, life more or less returned to its normal course on Baggdathi. Of the numerous attempts at normalization that were undertaken by the authorities, the reactivation of joint cooperation activities with Hospital Planet merits mention.
To facilitate transportation between the two planets, a direct gateway was installed between them. But the flow of traffic is reversed this time: it is no longer the sick children from Hospital Planet that come to visit Baggdathi's amusement parks, but the destitute from the latter, affected with the most diverse and horrible diseases, that are used as a source to populate the medical-zoo on the former.

more, the capital of Amahdis was in joint cooperation with Hospital Planet, and many terminally ill children came to spend their last days here.

Oda's mother was a six-armed robot, endowed with unreal grace and a divine gift for dance. A Hospital Planet surgeon carried off the feat of allowing her to imitate a bio-type destiny, by endowing her with the ability to give life, and she was impregnated by the implantation of an ovary from a magnificent-looking sick woman. Oda's father had hoped to increase even further his fortune by marrying his daughter into a favorable alliance. But Oda's fate was already destined for all of eternity. She became the wife of Aghnar — the second Metabaron, and that was the end of delusions of grandeur for Baggdathi-the-Pearl's monarch. He became insane and his wonderful kingdom, where one traded in peace and built huge fortunes, was delivered into the hands of numberless predators with insatiable ap-petites from galaxies all over. Baggdathi-the-Pearl was carved up and entered in-to a dismal era of chaos, which con-tinues still today.

Sec-Hum

Aliens: Gords, Hireas and Odor1ters (Suuskins)
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Minor World
Climate: Torrid, temperate and glacial
Day Length: 12 standard hours
Year Length: 127 local days
Government: Tribal
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Saturated
Major Exports: Perfumes, ore beads
Major Imports: Weapons
Planet's Function: No role on the Imperial scale, but it is the guardian Podrih-Do's refuge
Population: Approximately 1 billions individuals
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 4dt
Spaceport: None
Technology: Industrial
Terrain: Deserts, marshes, oceans
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Otocomo
Star System: Soto

Physical Characteristics: The first of four planets in the Soto system, Sec-Hum presents the particularity of being half desert and half water, contrary to the three other planets (Kolohoro, Sohoro, and Gobo) which are completely arid. This immense ball of 58,000 kilometers in diameter, rotates on its axis in twelve standard hours, and completes its orbit in 127 standard days. Perfectly aligned on the axis of its ecliptic, Sec-Hum always presents the same side to the photonic rays of its astral sun. The well-lit half of the planet is composed of a quarter desert and a quarter water. At the crossing of these two antagonistic worlds, on a wide median strip, extends an unstable region of swamps and quicksand. On the dark side of the planet, the watery quarter is essentially composed of an immense ice floe stowed down to the pole, which covers three quarters of this semi-crescent plunged into an eternally freezing night. The arid quarter is a vast bare zone of frozen stone over which run beds of poisoned lichen. The junction between these two quarters is an immense shoreline fixed in a silence so hostile it would haunt the nightmares of a blind man. Essentially composed of oxygen and hydrogen, Sec-Hum's atmosphere is incessantly being traversed on one side of the sphere by endless columns of jagged clouds, and on the other, by scalding gusts of wind loaded with corrosive debris.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 16sah24

Satellites: Sec-Hum has two satellites, Flame and Droplet.

Flora and Fauna: This world, precisely cut into quarters, provides a habitat for extremely varied flora and fauna, which changes according to the zone. In the aquatic part exposed to sunlight, quantities of amphibious species (mollusks, crustaceans, fish, sea mammals, etc.) live along with numerous amounts of odd plants and vegetables (moss, seaweed, coral, etc.). The aquatic section which is plunged in darkness is much more mysterious. Underwater trenches plummet thousands of meters deep into the heart of the planet, and it wouldn't be surprising that fantastic and fanciful creatures lived there. In the arid, lighted zone, if the flora is poor (crooked cacti, close-cropped moss, thorny bushes), the fauna is rich, notably in crawling insects and ophidian creatures. The air is filled with unsettling hisses and the piercing squeak of beetle wing-cases. On the dark side, the fauna gives way to the flora. Toxic lichens that cover the ground give the area an atmosphere of silent desolation. In the median plane, which separates the dry world from the humid, rich, varied, and mysterious flora and fauna colonize the area. As it is difficult to ac-cess this zone, the flora and fauna remain poorly known.

If you can believe the accounts of an independent smuggler who has frequent business with the Odoraters, it seems they have perfected a "magic" perfume, which allows them to control the minds of those who breath it. A veritable potion of powerful charms, it offers to those who get a hold of it a fantastic conquering weapon that works in an effectively serene and quiet way.

Population: Two large populations inhabited the Sec-Hum planet. In the arid barren part live the Gords — a tribe of humanoids covered with foul-smelling scales. Where the sun continuously beats down its hot rays, the Gord's presence inevitably produces an atmos-phere unbearable to the human nose. On the other hand, in the aquatic section live the Hireas — perfumed, aquatic people who emit subtle and delicate fragrances. The social hierarchy of these two groups is organized according to olfactory particularities. The more the individual's scent is pronounced, the higher his position in society. (With respect to customary human criteria, a meeting of the Gords Tribe Wiseman's council is a veri-

table infectious stench to the nostrils. However, the privilege of a face-to-face meeting with a Hireas dignitary is pure rapture.) In the median plane, which separates the two antagonistic half-worlds lives a third people — the Suuskins, or Ordoraters. They owe their name to their thorough and detailed knowledge of aromatic molecules, and their ability to synthesize them.

Additional Information: From time immemorial, the Gords and the Hireas haven't been able to stand one another. War between them was old habit. The Ordoraters, on the other hand, have more recently appeared on the scene. They form a peaceful, trading people, who maintain a very profitable business activity with both the Gords and the Hireas, to whom they sold perfumes and essences alternately fetid and intoxicating. From time to time, they didn't hesitate selling weapons to one or the other to help them bring an end to their quarrel. Finally, the Gords appealed to Aghnar, the mercenary Metabaron for his services, in order to eliminate the Hireas. But it cannot be ruled out that representatives of these aquatic people, hidden in the deepest ocean trenches, may have survived the massacre.

Nibal

Aliens: Zerkots
Atmosphere: Type III (breather unit required)
Category: Minor World (of the Exofringe)
Climate: Hot and humid
Day Length: 28 standard hours
Year Length: 753 local days
Government: Ultraparticipative
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Saturated
Major Exports: Precision Technology
Major Imports: Weapons
Planet's Function: Unbeknownst to the Zerkots, Nibal serves as an experimentation base for the Techno-Technos
Population: 3.54 billion specimens (excluding machines)
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 2dt
Spaceport: First Class
Technology: Space
Terrain: Plains, marshes
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Dius
Star System: Antri
Physical Characteristics: Second planet of the Antri system, which counts three in all (Abu and Hamos are the two others), Nibal was originally a small sphere (17,000 kilometers in diameter) rich in metallic minerals of all sorts and hydrocarbons. Nibal rotates on its axis in 28 standard hours, and completes its orbit in 753 standard days. Initially, a vast continental plateau recovered nine tenths of its surface, with an inland sea occupying the remaining tenth. The natural atmosphere was a mix of gas rich in oxygen. Today, carbon dioxide and fluoro-chlorinated waste compounds compose the base of its ambient air. The normal rhythm of seasons (a hot season and a cold season separated by two short intermediary seasons) has been greatly disrupted, and the climate today is uniformly heavy and muggy. The planet mass has been considerably enlarged by the agglomeration of diverse neighboring astral bodies utilized for construction materials, and its diameter has increased to 37,000 kilometers.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 76mac60
Satellites: Nibal today no longer has any satellites.
Flora and Fauna: From its meager original flora, nothing has survived. For that which would be the animal kingdom, all the endemic species have been engulfed and consumed by a local race of saurians — the Zerkots.
Population: Two large populations shared the planet: the Zerkots (telepathic saurians) and the Giant-Machines. The former created the latter, but these creatures escaped from their masters' control. After a period of self-autonomization, the Giant-Machines entered into rebellion against the saurians.
Additional Information: Cold-blooded creatures endowed with intelligence and capable of picking up negative thoughts emitted by any thinking beings nearby, the Zerkots embarked upon a technological conquest of their environment, which was possibly initially spurred on by a representative of the Techno-Techno Cult. Thus they transformed their small planet into an immense mega-city run by instrumentation of a greater and greater sophistication. This growing sophistication reached its highest point with the revolution of the Giant-Machines.

The telepathic Zerkots worked out a strategy for tapping into thoughts founded on systematic distrust. On their side, the machines and devices pushed their own intelligence so far that they came to feel the emotion of melancholy. In fact, only their boundless adoration of their creators kept them from giving into a profound suicidal impulse. The Zerkots perceived to the point of disgust and disillusionment the sticky flood of sentimentalist emotions emanating from their machine-creations and hastened to closely screen out these annoying emotions, through their analytically paranoid sifters.

Their mutual incomprehension quite naturally lead to an irreparable state, and the mercenary Metabaron Aghnar was called to intervene, bringing an end to the intelligent Giant-Machines' bloody condemnation of those who scorned their adulation. Since then, Nipal has been in a pitiful state, but it still harbors colossal technical resources.

The "Forbidden City" sleeps in the ruins of Nibal. This ancient, dilapidated megalopolis was not so long ago the neurasthenic machine nerve center. Plunged into a deep sleep, this powerful technology wants only to be rescued and to give itself over to its savior…

Filodendra

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Minor World
Climate: Temperate

Day Length: 32 Standard hours
Year Length: 487 local days
Government: Techno-Pope
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Humid
Major Exports: Bikramen
Major Imports: Manual labor, technology
Planet's Function: Bikramen production, a compound permitting the synthetic production of epiphyte
Population: 2 billion inhabitants, all immigrants/nonnatives
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 2dt
Spaceport: Stellar Class
Technology: Space
Terrain: Plains
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Selva
Star System: Tri-sol
Physical Characteristics: The Tri-Sol system, lit by a complex triple star, groups nine planets, of which Filodendra is the largest (74,000 kilometers in diameter). A terra-teflon-concrete planet, Filodendra completes a rotation on its axis in 32 hours. Without being exceptionally rich (with the exception of an extremely dense vein of bikramen), the underground layers contain all the necessary elements for a harmonious development (metal, mineral, hydrocarbon compounds). Formerly a veritable haven of natural beauty, Filodendra offered its visitors a full spectrum of landscapes: forests, prairies, rivers, oceans, mountains, and deserts. Harmoniously blended into the scenery, the housing developments mixed subtly with nature to compose a serene and soothing picture. The atmosphere was predominately composed of oxygen, and the air was brisk and intoxicating. In the image of Terra Prima, Filodendra experienced all climates. Seasons were well defined, alternating calmly throughout their year of 487 days.
Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 36dnd49
Satellites: Filodendra has seven silver moons.
Flora and Fauna: Thanks to its exceptional natural conditions, Filodendra provided a habitat for an exuberant natural life. Millions of wild species cohabited and formed an exceptional ecological equilibrium. Filodendra had notably a tree whose fruit was extremely obliging, flying into the air when ripe and offering itself for tasting. But above all, the planet concealed the most ancient tree known to the galaxy: a halerce tree, 250,000 standard years old, with golden leaves, made up of five million dioucas — tiny feathered creatures who are legendary, capable of singing with the pure voice of the castratos.
Population: Until the period of the third Metabaron, Steelhead, Filodendra was populated by a mix of humans and mutants, all extremely preoccupied with preserving the fragile beauty and wonderful equilibrium of their planet. Today, Filodendra is inhabited exclusively by Techno-technicians and other industrial paleo-vultures, specialized in extraction mining, who come from all the galaxies to pull up and tear out the riches from the earth.

"Look, I'm tellin' you there ain't just bikramen down there! There's goddamn sulfide... and I know what I'm talkin' 'bout, 'cause I was part of that ex-plor-a-tion team that went underground on Gehenna V..." — One of the first humanoid workers sent underground, overheard talking in a miners bar.

Additional Information: The Troglosocialk galaxy's capital planet, Filodendra, was with regard to Techno-Techno criteria, relatively underdeveloped. The paleo-architecture of its buildings was an insult to the postmodern technological norms. But its inhabitants, under the authority of Don Nicanor Rosamel de Roka and then his daughter Dona Vincenta Gabriella de Rokha, lived in harmony with their environment and in total respect of their planet and its beauties. Unfortunately, the taste for the simple life had a disadvantage — great military weakness. When the Techno-Technos' galactic bloodhounds detected huge bikramen deposits (a precious ore permitting massive production of artificial epyphite) in the Troglosocalik system, that was the end of peace and tranquility for Filodendra. The cheerful ecological planet underwent a final and definitive assault by the Techno-Techno metamorphe armada, during which Don Nicanor, already brought back once from death, met with his definitive end. During the battle, the Rokhas's ancestral castle, the second halerce tree (brought from Gzagn by Steelhead), magnificent ancient cities, and thousands of other splendors were reduced to a state of ruin. All of Filodendra's inhabitants were transported to a terra-formed world, made of teflon and granyl, and their planet was torn apart.

Gzagn

Aliens: Macrolice
Atmosphere: Type II (Breather Unite recommended)
Category: Distant World
Climate: Hot
Day Length: 11 hours and 42 minutes, standard
Year Length: 47 local days
Government: Monarchy
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Saturated
Major Exports: None
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: None
Population: 250 billion individuals
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 7dt
Spaceport: None
Technology: Alien Iindustrial
Terrain: High plateaux, basins, marshes, deltas
Type: Terrestrial
Galaxy: Black
Constellation: Nol
Star System: Blackhol
Physical Characteristics: Enveloped in a heavy atmosphere of methane and sulfuric acid compounds, the little planet Gzagn (12,000 kilometers in diameter) forms the center of the cavernous Blackhol system. A veritable cosmic aberration, Blackhol is a black star that emits a faint light with viscous reflections. Gzagn rotates on its axis in

11 hours 42 minutes and completes its orbit in 47 standard days. The vast continental basin which forms its surface has a deep depression in its center, watered by a dense subterranean hydrographic network, loaded with putrid sediments. At regular intervals, downpours sweep the edges of the basin, filling its core with seeping floods of heavy, viscous rains. The chemical combination of alluvial deposits and micro-organisms release intensely foul-smelling clouds in permanence. The ground presents a spongy and jelly-like texture.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 27ars19

Satellites: Gzagn has one satellite, Gavel.

Flora and Fauna: On this not very cheerful planet grew a wonder of nature — an old halerce tree of 370,000 standard years, where nine million dioucas nested. This tree and its birds the Metabaron Melmoth removed to give to his true love, Doña Vincenta of Filodendra.

Apart from this tree, there was no plant life on the surface of Gzagn. However, besides an abundant bacterial wildlife, Gzagn houses an immense population of macromites, which fed on chemical miasma and revered the sacred halerce.

Population: The macromites, who have reached a particular stage of development halfway between the animal kingdom and human intelligence, make up the only recorded population on Gzagn. Despite this slight delay on evolution's highway, they have developed a strong religious feeling. Thus they venerate the Buddha-louse, a venerable spiritually illuminated louse, who lived glued to the tree. Each morning, as the celestial star rose on the horizon, a mysterious device offset a trembling of the halerce, and thousands of freshly laid doucas's eggs fell from the tree. The macromites fed on the eggs in ecstasy. As for the millions of dioucas who lived in the tree, they fed on the sap — a sweet nectar that clarified their voices.

Additional Information: Ungainly in its appearance is a veritable insult to the sense of smell, Gzagn well merits being called the "foulest place in the Universe."

Since the disappearance of their sacred halerce, the macromites have lost faith in their ancestral religion. They savagely tore the Buddha-louse to shreds and scattered his remains across their putrid planet. From that point on, they have been awaiting the return of their intergalactic messiah, with their eyes riveted towards the skies, a mix of hope and anguish in their hearts. He will come looking for them and lead them into spreading further death and chaos in the cosmos….

Central Planet

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Major World
Climate: Cold
Day Length: 77 standard hours
Year Length: 77 local days
Government: Supreme Central Computer and Techno-Pontificate
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Major Exports: Technology
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: Techno-Techno's seat of power, the Guardian Ophidat's refuge
Population: 7 billion inhabitants
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 1hT
Spaceport: First Class
Technology: Space (and more)
Terrain: Plains
Type: Terratransformed asteroid
Galaxy: Milky Way, Terra Prima's galaxy
Constellation: Forum
Star System: Tekna
Physical Characteristics: Originally, Central Planet was a barren asteroid revolving around the small Tekna system. Despite an extremely modest size (a diameter of barely 5000 kilometers), this tiny celestial body had a gravity superior to that of the four planets in the system. At first intrigued by this phenomenon, then fascinated by the mystery of the high-tech relics unearthed in the heart of the sphere, the Techno-Techno authorities decided to establish the seat of its sacred headquarters here. After ten centuries of Herculean construction efforts by an armada of robot-factories, Central Planet today presents the respectable size of 77,777 kilometers in diameter. An artificial atmosphere was created, comprised of hydrogen and oxygen and perfumed with incense. Permanently protected by a positron shield, Central Planet experiences neither seasonal nor climatological phenomenons of any kind. Its core's powerful magnetism remains perceptible for parsecs around.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 77tek77

Satellites: Central Planet has two satellites: Romulus and Remus.

Flora and Fauna: There is absolutely no natural animal or plant life on Central Planet.

Population: Close to seven billion individuals live on Central Planet.

Additional Information: The Techno-papal headquarters, Central Planet concentrates all branches of the Techno-saint religion. Techno-seminars train future Techno-temple executives (Techno-popes, Techno-bishops, Techno-cardinals, Techno-monks, Techno-vergers, Techno-altar boys, and even Techno-castratos) intended to serve in the laboratory factories. This colossal organization is equally known by the name of Magnus Dei.

Besides its adminis-trative system, Central Planet oversees the training of

The Supreme Central Brain is anxious… Occiputal-Cogito, its divinatory mind, announced the coming of weird and troubled times, where the Techno-Technos order's perfect organization will be threatened by a new kind of hero. Animated by unwavering faith, these valiant knights of a thousand virtues could jeopardize the all powerful Tenebrae, armed only with their courage, forged in the heart of their honor code….

its military wing, the Techno-crusaders. The soldiers of the Church of the Industrial Saints are all abandoned male children, gathered from Hospital Planet or elsewhere, or sometimes abducted here and there in the cosmos.

The unassailable Techno temple, impregnable heart of the sacred Techno headquarters (which, nonetheless, could not withstand the superhuman powers of the Metabaron Steelhead) is the Techno-Pope's residence. In its vaults, secret archives and sacred Techno-relics contain paleo-secrets that go back to the origins of humanity. But that isn't all: Hidden in a crypt buried deeper still than all the others, is one of the greatest and best kept mysteries of the universe.

Despite an innocuous first impression, the three Ophidian creatures with metallic reflecting skin (gold, silver, and bronze), the three Bodras, who live here are in fact the keepers and protectors of an immeasurably powerful technology, older than the universe itself. It happens that on the scales of these metallic serpents all of the secrets to the greatest enigmas are engraved in characters of incomparable fineness. In these three entities, one can see the obscure source of power of the Techno-Techno order.

Arh and Rah

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Distant World
Climate: Temperate
Day Length: 19 standard hours
Year Length: 322 local days
Government: Egalitarian mystical
Gravity: Standard
Hydrosphere: Moderate
Major Exports: Rare raw materials
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: None
Population: 200 million (on the two planets)
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 4dT
Spaceport: None
Technology: Feudal
Terrain: Hills, plains
Type: Terrestrial (with some particularities)
Galaxy: Doublon
Constellation: Gemini
Star System: Binario
Physical Characteristics: This strange cosmogonic ensemble, under the sign of the twins, is made up of two sets of intimately associated planets and suns, each of the two former rotating around each of the two latter. The respective orbits completed by Arh and Rah are perfectly synchronized: At the winter solstice, they occupy two diametrically opposed positions and are several millions of kilometers distant from one another. During the summer solstice, the two planets come near enough to brush up against one another. A temporary acceleration of the rotating speed compensates the force of attraction between these two heavenly bodies, which allows them to touch lightly without colliding into one another. For each of these two planets, the orbit is completed in 322 standard days. This amusing astronomic particularity gave birth to two civilizations, distinct but perfectly united, who have developed one of the most original symbiotic existences in the universe.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 22bes22
Satellites: The double planets Arh and Rah have no satellites.

Flora and Fauna: Arh and Rah are gifted with flora and fauna in every way comparable, with the only difference being that only male animals live on Rah, and obviously, those that live on Arh are female. Their reproduction is triggered by genetic pollination, which takes place at the moment of summer solstice, followed by the phenomenon of parthenogenesis and androgenesis. For the most part, the flora on Arh and Rah is made up of fodder planets and legumes, and the fauna is essentially made up of draft animals or livestock suitable for human consumption.

Population: The double planets are inhabited by two distinct populations of common origin. They are the humanoid race of Bessons.

Additional Information: On Arh live the female elements of the Bessons race, and of course, Rah accommodates the male elements of the same race. Thus separated, the representatives of the two sexual principals consecrate the essential part of their existence to the preparation of the summer solstice, which marks the highpoint of their personal and social lives. After many rituals are accomplished in the Matrix Temple on Arh and the Gonad Temple on Rah respectively, and strength incantations are recited during the course of the year, the women on Arh and the men on Rah strip themselves naked, exposing themselves during the entire day of solstice to the radiance of the extremely nearby twin planet. This exposure to opposite sexual emissions brings about an impregnation of the Bessons females through photogenesis, an action entirely unique in all of that universe. Afterwards, during the winter solstice, the children carried by the Bessons females are born. The girls are kept on planet Arh, and the boys are given back to the Bessons males at the following summer solstice at the precise moment when the two planets are just barely touching.

The absolute ban that forbids male elements from visiting Arh and female elements from visiting Rah, isn't just a formality. In fact, all offenders are handed directly over to the "Mothers and Fathers of the Insemination's" mortal authority. These mystical guardians of Arh and Rah feel the vibrations emitted by the two planets when the presence of a representative of the opposite sex is detected. According to the tradition, only the perfect Androgyne can visit the two planets without risk, but Janus-Jana has always declined their invitations, as moreover, all of His-Her predecessors.

Galactic Platform Masses

Aliens: Arkarotes
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable) and Type II (breather unit recommended) according to the zone

Category: Distant Minor World
Climate: Variable
Day Length: Variable
Year Length: Variable
Government: Guilds
Gravity: Heavy
Hydrosphere: Dry
Major Exports: Ore, gems, technological residue/waste
Major Imports: Rudimentary technology

Veritable space funambulists, the "platform operators" are the Mass's lookouts. They relentlessly scan the horizons, pinpoint the upper and lower star beds, and then push away drifting asteroids with their long, energized sticks.

Planet's Function: Roaming planet with no major function
Population: 120 million inhabitants
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 21dt
Spaceport: 1st of a minimal class, on a neighboring asteroid firmly stowed/secured in the platform's wake
Technology: Industrial
Terrain: Plateaus, hills, plains
Type: Related to asteroid barriers
Galaxy: Kiraz
Constellation: Civilized Confines
Star System: Tezus

Physical Characteristics: An interstellar curiosity bordering on incongruity, the Galactic Platform Masses are giant platforms that travel up and down the civilized borders as a consequence of being carried along by the stellar winds. Their formation, and the beginning of their roaming, goes back approximately to the "great catastrophe" era, which is equally at the origin of the stellar ice floe's creation. From a geological standpoint, it consists of a planet's different strata, which has been literally cut into blocks by a mysterious force, still undetermined today. Since this dismemberment, the different formations, flat for the most part but having variable shapes and dimensions, remain held in place, regrouped among themselves, by a powerful residual magnetic field, no doubt stemming from the original planet core. Besides the tectonic cohesion effect, the Galactic Platforms' density allows the advantageous presence of a fine atmospheric layer (carbon, ozone, oxygen, and hydrogen), which is sufficient for maintaining life on the surface. Of course, the Galactic Platform Masses don't make an orbit. This said, their peregrinations in the interstellar void have almost certain similarities to a huge circular journey, which leads them in turn to the outskirts of different stars. Whereas they know neither the alternation of day and night, nor the phenomenon of seasons, the Galactic Platforms are not always lit on the same side by the different stars they cross. Consequently, conditions suitable for life are possible only in alternation on each face, according to changing rhythms. However, even with a favorable sun, the cross-sections (or platform layers) remain often barren and unsuitable for life.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 53ark72

Satellites: Different asteroids, sucked up in the Galactic Platforms' wake, act as satellites.

Flora and Fauna: Within such a context, the animal and plant species that populate the surface of the Galactic Platforms can be nothing but original. Enthu-siastic heliotrope followers, their first notable charac-teristic is to live exclusively in diurnal conditions. That being the case, it is impossible for them to synchronize their repose with the arrival of darkness. In practice, the animals, like other beings from higher orders, interrupt their activities when fatigue overcomes them to fall into a refreshing sleep, some in a lying-down position and others standing. The great diversity of circadian rhythms particular to each species means that one can always catch a glimpse, here and there, of an individual falling over into Morpheus' arms. For their part, the plants experience an uninterrupted growth cycle as soon as the platform upon which they live starts to be illuminated. However, when the sun's rays become more and more like slivers of light, indicating that the period of darkness is on its way, they prepare for a hibernation period of undetermined length. Each plant has the capacity to gather its genetic inheritance in hard and compact seeds, able to withstand millions of years in glacial conditions below absolute zero. Afterwards, exposure to a calorific ray allows them to immediately start germinating. For the animal species, certain ones enter into hibernation, but a good number observe a period of migration and pass from one facet to the other according to the position of the galactic belts in relation to solar asters.

Population: The inhabitants of the Galactic Platforms, called the Arkarotes, are extraterrestrial proto-humanoids perfectly adapted to their environ-ment. Because, in order to compensate for the gravity of 2.1 that reigns on the Galactic Platforms (Terra Prima's gravity being equal to 1) and weighs down bodies and objects, they developed a tremendous musculature. Their trunk is classically extended by four limbs, ending in a prehensile organ, which may be qualified as a hand. Although they can hold themselves vertically, they willingly adopt walking on all fours. Despite the gravity, they are extremely agile, allowing them to traverse the arches that join the platforms to one another with surprising speed and yet without risk. Additionally, the layers of the platforms are pierced by hundreds of tunnels that facilitate migration from one face to another.

Additional Information: Lost on some rocky islands in distress in the ultimate void, these veritable space castaways ended up carving out an enviable situation for themselves. In fact, their accounts in the Ekonomat's banking establishments are particularly well filled. One might wonder about the origins of their fortune, but in fact it is quite simple. Their territory, being in constant movement in the cosmos, drags in its wake unlimited quantities of asteroids, meteorites, and diverse debris, which sometimes contain veritable treasures: pure netrankkon, stellar crystal veins, etc. Across the thread of time, the Arkarotes made collecting meteorites in space into a specialty, so much so that they are often known by the name of "Meteorists."

Puzzeline

Aliens: None
Atmosphere: Type I (breathable)
Category: Distant World
Climate: Torrid
Day Length: 26 standard hours
Year Length: 524 local days
Government: Theocracy
Gravity: Light
Hydrosphere: Dry
Major Exports: None
Major Imports: None
Planet's Function: None
Population: an average of 1 billion inhabitants, taking into account extreme variations
Proximity to a Techno-Tunnel: 9dt
Spaceport: None
Technology: Feudal
Terrain: Medium-sized mountains, deserts, plains, abyss, caves
Type: Related to terrestrial planets
Galaxy: Hersa
Constellation: Fyack
Star System: Solis

Physical Characteristics: The Solis system is a surprising configuration in which two planets, Trompo and Puzzeline (also called Puzzeline the Mysterious) dance a strange ballet. A small, extremely dense stellar body (1,500 kilometers in diameter, 3.7 times Terra Prima's gravity, 5.56 millions of kilometers from Solis), Trompo rotates on its axis at a vertiginous speed. It equally presents the particularity of resting perfectly in place, like an eternally wound-up top, carrying out its crazed rotation around an invisible string that cuts across space. Trompo is completely inhabitable.

Puzzeline, for its part, is mobile. It completes a vast orbit around the Solis star and the fixed point of Trompo. Endowed with an atmosphere rich in oxygen, Puzzeline is entirely favorable to life, and its inhabitants would linger on there happily day after day, if a strange break-up phenomenon didn't come at regular intervals to trouble their tranquility. Thousands of years of physical stress, undergone by Puzzeline at each passage before Trompo, had at first eroded the geological equilibrium of its continental plates and then enlarged the fracture lines to the point of fissuring the planet to its core. Since that time, during its orbital journey, which lasts exactly 524 days, 6 hours, and 27 standard minutes, Puzzeline experiences two distinct phases of breaking apart and recomposition. At the summer solstice, when Puzzeline is opposite Trompo and behind the sun, Puzzeline appears perfectly united, in a form and shape comparable to that of other planets. Then during the 262 standard days that follow, as Puzzeline approaches Trompo, crevices appear at its surface. Little by little, these fissures become gulfs and then chasms. The planet disintegrates. This phase culminates on the 262nd day (winter solstice), when Puzzeline is precisely in the axis of Trompo and Solis. The planet is then splintered into eleven principal pieces, and 658 less important bits. Next, the phenomenon stabilizes and slowly reverses itself to the point of Puzzeline's complete recompostion. Every year for thousands of years, it has proceeded in this way, and will continue to do so for millions of years to come.

Hyperspatial Approach Vector Coordinates: 46puz97
Satellites: Puzzeline has two small satellites called the Children of Mother Puzzeline.

Flora and Fauna: At Puzzeline's surface, the vegetation is uniformly cropped: from the lichens in the cold zones to the savannas of the arid zone. The rare trees barely reach five or six meters in height. A crawling ivy carpets the bottom of the crevices. Each year, it is ripped out at the time of disintegration, but it bravely starts out again the following season. Relatively rich, Puzzeline's fauna has no predator. All of the land mammals are vegetarian.

Population: The quite specific conditions that govern life on Puzzeline have, of course, fashioned a highly original civilization, where the dominant theme is migration. This is because the areas most favorable to life when the planet is perfectly formed turn into the most hostile at the time of disintegration. Survival becomes extremely difficult there, indeed even impossible. The battle for the best lands is harsh and made that much harder when the year advances toward the summer solstice, with the harvests just garnered and the race against time for the best refuges begins. Every year, these two great exoduses give rise to numerous confrontations and other battles, where an important part of the population perishes.

On the fringe of Puzzeline's population lives a religious sect who revere the "Mother Puzzeline." In accordance with the planet's particular requirements, Mother Puzzeline's followers (called the Puzzelars) also practice two pilgrimages per year. However, at the winter solstice, instead of taking refuge on one of the larger blocks of the planet, they penetrate into the heart of the planet through the fissures, to reach their cave sanctuaries. During Puzzeline's recomposition, only half of the followers leave the caves to live at the surface and preach the words of Mother Puzzeline. There is therefore a community of Puzzelars who live permanently in the depths of Puzzeline.

On Puzzeline, like on many other worlds, young males often show off to prove to their sweethearts that they are the robust and dauntless men that these young women had been wishing for. In demonstration of their bravery, instead of confronting one another in duels, or engaging in some courtship display, they practice an extremely dangerous form of love exhibition: When the planet commences its breaking apart phase, the young males leap over the widening open chasms, jumping from one piece of earth to another. In certain seasons, the losses are appalling, to the extent that the number of sons of Puzzeline who have disappeared in this manner is no longer counted.

Aliens

At this stage in the contest to conquer space, the human race from Terra Prima is in the overwhelming majority in the universe. Following the great Diaspora — the exodus of Terra Prima's elite to the Golden Planet, the conquest of gigantic Maganats by generals affiliated with the Empire, and the expanding settlement of Terra Prima's damned on tens of thousands of major and minor colonized worlds — humanity has settled on all the viable sites they have found, often to the detriment of intelligent and other life forms unfortunate enough to be in their way.

With their customary conquering spirit, humans have more often exterminated than assimilated. Yet the universe is vast. Many areas have not yet been explored, and an indeterminate number of alien races have not yet been discovered. These races are at different stages of development. Some are at the dawn of evolution, whereas others are highly developed civilizations with a command of powerful technology. In its unrelenting advance, the human race has shamelessly annihilated the weakest, most peaceful and defenseless alien races and has come to terms with those that it could not tackle head on.

This means that some aliens, generally humanoids, are sometimes found integrated into human groups and populations. Although they are more or less tolerated, they still tend to be snubbed, partiuclarly when their physical characteristics make them obviously alien. The rebel communities, especially the pirates mercilessly hounded by the Imperial forces, have a much higher proportion of aliens than the standard worlds, where the majority of the population is human. However, in some systems and galaxies, Colonial and Maganat planets co-exist with alien worlds able to stand up to them. Here, the human and alien worlds maintain diplomatic, although not necessarily courteous, relations in order to avoid any annoying escalation of violence with regrettable consequences for everyone concerned. Human ambassadors are therefore found on alien planets and vice versa. Sometimes, this policy of openness leads to trade and even the establishment of communities in the other world. In some extreme cases, mixed marriages have even been reported. But this is much more the exception than the rule.

Human-alien hybrids or multispecies mixes are not numerous, but they are possible. The universe is vast, and what might be rare in one place could be common in another. If it has ever been dreamd of, and even some things that haven't, it most likely exists somewhere in the universe.

Humans generally see the alien races as mysterious and inscrutable. They develop their own customs and lifestyles on their worlds, worshipping obscure gods, drawing on unknown forces, and even acquiring superior technologies.

Many planets and peoples of this universe have characteristics not based on the basic physical laws — the Akuas (described in this chapter) are just one example of this. Space is vast and not uniform. The Human Universe is not a clockwork universe with easily definable laws. (If you are playing the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* this means that you should feel free to throw in your own peculiar places, strange civilizations, and bizarre manifestations.)

Although some are lucky enough not to be on the Empire's expansionist map, time is not necessarily on their side, since they could reach a stage of development that makes them forces to be reckoned with. Fortunately for human dominance, the alien races have never united against the all-powerful Human Empire. Some aliens also nurse an intense hatred of other aliens, and this blind hatred could push them as far as to form alliances with the Empire to fight their enemy.

The Nunars

Natives of Nunh, these tiny space travelers suffer from Peter Pan paleo-syndrome. Although they can live as long as 3,000 standard years, they look like eternal cherubs with the naive pureness of children. There have been reports of sightings from all over, but they are rarely substantiated as if no one believed those who saw them or the witnesses decided to keep their secret.

Kindly, but shy, the Nunars may decide to aid anyone they think deserves help. In addition to the advice they give, which is solely advice since they refuse to get physi-

cally involved in a situation, the Nunars can detect the vectors of powers in the universe: gateways, guardians, forces, and treasures of all kinds. This talent has earned them the nickname "cherub probes" or "pedo-probes."

The Gords, Hireas, and Suuskins

Three of the most interesting alien races live on the Soto system's planet Sec-Hum in the Terra Prima galaxy. They represent exactly what interstellar travelers can expect to come across on their travels through space. Sec-Hum is a vast sphere 58,000 kilometers in diameter and perfectly aligned with its ecliptic axis. This incredibly rare cosmological attribute creates an astonishing geophysical effect: Half of the planet is permanently lit, while the other half is immersed in perpetual darkness. Sec-Hum is also half-water and half-desert, equally distributed over each of the two hemispheres. One top quarter of the planet is a permanently sun-baked desert, while the lower quarter is a desert that never sees the light. One quarter on the other side is a sunny sea, and the last water-covered quarter is plunged into darkness. The range of temperatures on the planet's surface varies enormously from the scorching desert with its average of around 80°C to a polar average of –100°C on the other side of the world.

A wide belt of swampland stretches around the globe between the water world and the desert world. Under the midday sun, these marshes are huge fetid, insect-infested lagoons. In the nighttime of the north, they are tundra, where stinging lichens grow and repulsive crawling creatures with huge shells swarm.

The Gords, the Hireas, and the Suuskins live respectively in the deserts, the seas, and the marshland.

The Gords

The Gords — a humanoid people covered in stinking scales — live in the arid desert part of the planet. They are perfectly adapted to the constraints of their environment. They can endure the highest temperatures and survive cold close to zero degrees.

Physical Characteristics

Although their shape suggests a remote human ancestry, certain physical details irrefutably rank them among the alien races. They average 2.5 meters in height with athletic and well-proportioned bodies, even though their legs seem slightly too long. Their bodies are totally covered with thick heat-regulating scales that protect them, but that also give them a particularly putrid body odor.

Habitat

Impelled by the demands of an extreme environment, the Gords are the kings of mimetic fusion with their surroundings. They have developed this technique to the point of being able to inhabit the most arid landscape, become one with it, and live off the meager resources it has to offer. They can find shelter in the smallest rocky overhang and water in the finest mist. But above all, they have become masters in the art of burying themselves alive in a deep cataleptic sleep and surviving the worst meteorological fury for long periods of time. They don't reserve this faculty just for their scorching desert; they can just as easily survive on the steppes of the northern tundra.

They have built their capital at the junction between the hot desert and the cold desert. This small town of cave dwellings harbors their temple and their most precious treasures. The Gords have a hard time living an urban life and are generally nomadic.

Psychological Profile

The Gords are meditative with a definite animist leaning. They live in harmony with their environment and would be totally peaceful if fate had not made the Hireas their neighbors. The Hireas embody everything they abhor to see and smell, triggering an irrepressible hatred that compels them to make war on them and even sell their treasures to buy weapons.

Resources and Powers

Ever since they realized that the colored gems found under their arid desert aroused the greed of smugglers and other merchants, the Gords have armed themselves to the hilt with weapons of war. They have powerful artillery shrewdly combined with a swift and silent aerostatic force. Their soldiers are unrivalled on the ground, especially in the desert region. These formidable fighters can fire on the enemy without being seen. However, their supreme weapon is their command of the earth's force, with which they seem to have a virtually mystical affinity.

The Hireas

The sweet-smelling aquatic Hireas live in all the planet's waters. Wherever they go, they leave in their wake a delicately flowery and woody scent with a slight hint of spice. Prim and proper, but also military and rigid, the Hireas crisscross Sec-Hum's warm and cold waterways, living an active society life albeit with constant maneuvers and defense exercises.

Physical Characteristics

These huge fishlike creatures can grow to a length of five meters. They differ in shape depending on the water area in which they live. The deep-sea dwellers living in the depths of abysses thousands of meters deep often look quite monstrous with horns, armor, protuberances, and other deformities. However, the warm-water Hireas have long smooth and supple bodies. The vast majority of them have limbs in the form of short legs and scrawny arms but also sometimes, other organs they can grip with. Whatever their shape, the Hireas all have a gland at

the base of the brain that secretes a powerful neurological poison. This is also the source of the suave, heady fragrance they exude.

Habitat

The Hireas' habitat is one that is natural to amphibians: water. However, submarine towns are also dotted about here and there over the seabed. Since the Hireas are totally amphibian, these constructions serve merely as physical symbols of the strict social hierarchy. The high-ranking dignitaries live in hollow rock structures in which they nonchalantly float safe from the public gaze. Most of the other buildings house the huge administration, Hireas troop training centers, and the famous "death beds."

Psychological Profile

Probably because of the fact that they produce eggs hatched outside of the body, the Hireas are an extremely social and class-ridden people. Individuals bow down to the all-important group. Their artistic nature has so been perverted over time that a perfectly synchronized choreography of Hireas-Torpedoes in combat dress is now considered to be the epitome of beauty. It goes without saying that their hatred of the Gords is a strong element of social cohesion.

Resources and Powers

The Hireas are invincible in the water. However, they also have some amphibian units capable of evolving on dry land. In addition to their natural combat skills, they have acquired — in return for the extremely rare minerals produced by the deep-sea organisms — weapons to launch a viable counter-attack against the Gords.

However, the Hireas' military strength has been greatly weakened since the involvement of Metabaron Aghnar, recruited by the Gords. But the fish people have not given in yet and are striving, in the greatest secrecy, to convince the incredibly powerful giant creatures of the abysses to fight for their cause.

The Suuskins

The Suuskins, more commonly known as the "Odoraters," are border people who live in the midway belt that separates the desert area from the sea area. These discreet and totally odorless Odoraters make huge profits from their trade with the Gords and the Hireas. They originally sold aromatic extracts, either subtly musky or totally rank to order, since the concentration of smells is a determining social criteria among both opposed peoples. They then expanded their product range to all types of weapons with the exception of mass destruction weapons that could annihilate the planet. Their cynical attitude probably says more about what they are really up to than their apparently ordinary wheeling and dealing. The Odoraters are also the only inhabitants of Sec-Hum with the means to leave the planet and travel through space.

Physical Characteristics

The tiny, slender, almost fragile Odoraters have the sly humanoid look of those who can manage to slip by anywhere unnoticed. Yet despite their frail appearance, they are as solid as rock. Harshly trained from birth, the Odoraters are capable of bounding incredible distances in one leap. The skin covering their bodies is one big sensor that absorbs all energy and airborne material, such as light rays, water molecules in the air, and various other particles. The skin then transforms them into dopamine compounds that can be directly assimilated by their organism. The wonders they are capable of do not stop there; their command of chemical phenomena defies comprehension. Certain physical details set them apart from humans: They have only four fingers and four toes, and their bodies are almost totally hairless. Although they have hair on their heads, they are beardless and have no eyebrows or eyelashes.

Habitat

The Odoraters have built a massive network of underground tunnels and above ground buildings in the neutral belt. This vast swamp some hundred kilometers wide is bordered on one side by a luxurious mangrove and on the other by sparse short grass, forming a belt around the planet that cuts across the frozen and hot regions. The buildings on the surface are modest and totally in keeping with the Odoraters' self-styled image. Underground, however, their constructions reflect their real nature — invasion machines with an incredibly sophisticated arsenal.

Psychological Profile

Far from being neutral and kindly go-betweens in the quarrel between the Gords and the Hireas, the Odoraters are delighted about their merciless battle. Their big hope is to see them destroy one another so that they can once again

reign over a world they used to totally control. They have agreed with the force that inhabits Sec-Hum not to use their fabulous powers and to cultivate modesty and patience until they are strong enough to rise up. They are good pretenders. They are tough and hostile inside, and their feeling of superiority is equaled only by their determination.

Resources and Powers

The Odoraters are the owners of a colossal arsenal. In the depths of their secret galleries, they have tucked away a tremendous stock of the most sophisticated weapons available from the arms-dealing Maganats. In addition to this more classic equipment, they are in contact with a supra-universal entity, Podrih-Do, the guardian of the Puerko gateway, one of the six secret gateways in the Human Universe. From time to time, Podrih-Do divulges a secret to them, and the Odoraters advance one more step on the road to power.

The Akuas

As goods transporters and trade have replaced human expeditions to discover unknown worlds, so space has gradually lost its mysterious appeal and has become merely a usable and exploitable "dimension," like a new road linking the outermost bounds of the universe. Rare are those who know about the wonders, forces, and cosmic entities at work in this infinite space. Few people are aware of the energy currents that cross it from the six gateways and influence the evolution of the races more profoundly than all the Techno-Techno inventions put together. So few have ever heard of the Akuas.

Born of a remarkable paradox, these fossilized creatures were created by the passing of the dry and humid energy flow from Per-Beod. Akuaridh, home planet to these bone-and-sand extra-terrestrials and the only place where they can live, is right in the middle of a telluric knot where this energy ebbs and flows like a cosmic tide. Despite its immersion in the humid currents from Per-Beod that constantly sweep over the planet, Akuaridh is a total desert containing nothing more than mineral flora made up of innumerable varieties of rocks. Water is totally nonexistent and is excluded and banned in all its forms. No plants can grow on the planet, and although no one has ever attempted to set up the technological means for artificial water, it is clear that even artificial water tends to disappear from Akuaridh's surface. Yet the Akuas are well acquainted with the concept of water since they believe that space is a huge ocean.

They profoundly believe in their minds, altered by the singular nature of their homeworld and creation, that their planet is a mineral island in the all-encompassing sea of space. Their entire culture is based on this deep-seated belief in the Mother Ocean. Convinced of the existence of water, but unable to get near it, get hold of it, or taste it, the Akuas see space as a supreme divinity. Their mental picture of it is as a living entity with a superior mind, to which they owe their life, knowledge, and survival.

Everyday Akua life is based on this extremely particular relationship with water and space. These relatively well-developed creatures combine their craftwork expertise with a remarkable artistic sensitivity and a surprising societal awareness to form a people isolated from virtually all outside influences. Water worship is more than a cult. It is such a fundamental pillar of Akua life that the social structure naturally incorporates each individual's relationship to space and its secrets. The hierarchy is hence defined by their level of consciousness, and they recognize and respect one another based on their relationship with the Mother Ocean.

If the Akua lifestyle were compared with a conventional religious structure, all the inhabitants of

Alien Business

Since the Empire's official trade is in the hands of the Church of Industrial Saints' Merchants' Guild and the Ekonomat merchants — two of the Four Pillars of the Empire the least inclined to have anything to do with non-humans — the alien races find it very difficult to penetrate the usual trade channels. Fortunately, the rebel factions — pirates, independent mercenaries, and even certain Colonial planets — are not averse to doing business with these intergalactic trade outcasts since they can force them to accept tough terms and prices. The black market is consequently full of exotic exports direct from alien worlds, and staggering quantities of stolen goods — including weapons and technologies — find their way to planets they should never have landed on.

Akuaridh would be followers. All Akuas are convinced that they are intimately linked with the ocean that is space and, as if this is proved by their very existence, uphold the beliefs and perpetuate the rites of their fellow creatures. The creatures involved in organizing ceremonies such as the Netting Dance could then be considered to be initiates, since they have an in-depth knowledge of the close link among their planet, their evolution, and the Mother Ocean. The initiates can feel the tidal flows, interpret certain signs, teach the youngest, and actively participate in discussions on the strengths of certain mental powers gained from their faith. Last but not least come the priests, the oldest and most mystical Akuas. They are considered to be the Mother Ocean's emissaries and prophets of its will. They have ten times the mental abilities of their fellow creatures, and their powers influence both mineral matter and the energy currents themselves.

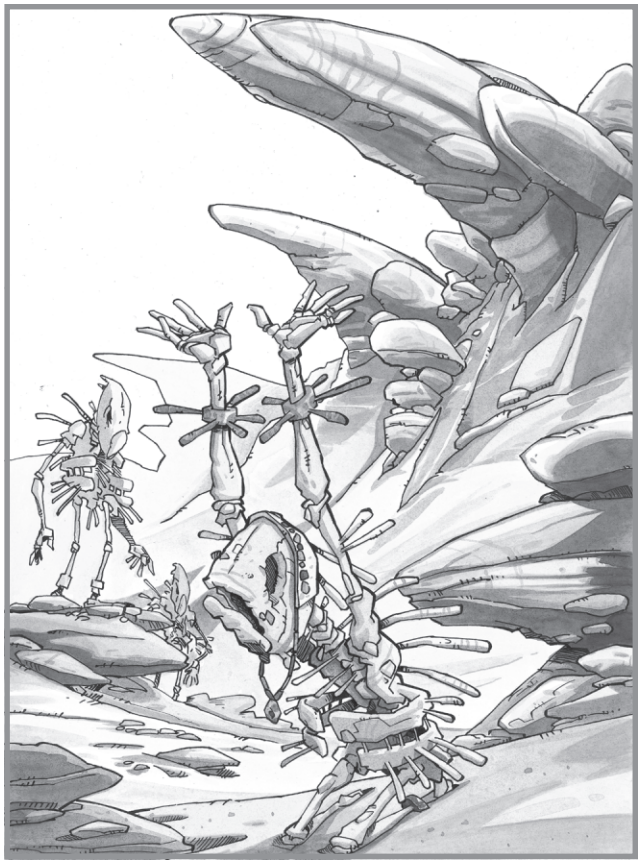
The Akuas believe that the cosmic flows are tides and that passing spaceships and explorers are inhabitants of this infinite sea. The Netting Ceremony — a firm tradition with the Akuas dating back dozens of generations — stems from this extraordinary relationship with the Mother Ocean. The Akuas assemble in the center of sand lakes dotted all over Akuaridh. The priests then put the followers and initiates into a deep mystical trance through which they enter into contact with the Mother Ocean. In addition to producing a mind-warped vision of space, the Akuas use this ritual to influence the humid current and provoke disturbances that pan out through the confines of space like a ripple effect. The Akuas see these waves as nets they can use to "fish" nearby vessels. The "nets" create magnetic disturbances, computer and equipment problems, voices, visions, sudden desires, and mystical occurrences experienced by conscious individuals.

Many electromagnetic phenomena reported around Akuaridh can be traced back to the Netting Ceremonies, but hardly anyone knows why expeditions disappear in this particular area. They will continue to be in the dark until they discover what the Akuas' irresistible fascination with water impels them to do: devour everything that it contains.

Physical Characteristics

The Akuas are humanoids, slighty smaller in size than a man. They have no organs and a fishlike skeleton. They are two-legged with two prehensile hands, which means that they can walk and do most of the things that humans can do — with the exception of reproduction. The Akuas have no concept of gender. They are born in the sand like fossils and awake under the influence of the cosmic tides.

Their bone structure is incredibly resistant, and their lack of vital organs makes them formidable adversaries in single combat. However, they drop like flies under fire from weapons of mass destruction and area effects . They cannot speak, but communicate with one another by telepathy and express their emotions through a series of jaw-grinding actions.



Habitat

Most Akua dwellings are underground caves dug into the mountainside or the rocky soil. There is no need for the concepts of towns and villages since the Akuas systematically gather together in well-balanced numbers of priests, initiates and followers. Each city has three priests, twenty-one initiates, and some hundred followers. The number of followers may be one or two individuals over or under the hundred, but rarely more or less.

Their dwellings have a set structure, like an empty snail's shell. The priests live in the center of the rocky maze, and the initiates and followers live at regular intervals in the other decorated nooks and crannies. Sculptures are very important in this entirely mineral environment, and the status and personality of each Akua are stamped on his dwelling's ornaments, decor, and furnishings.

Psychological Profile

Although the Akuas are united by their faith in the Mother Ocean, they are independent in that they develop their own personalities, reactions and personal motivations — even though they are always driven by a given interpretation of their relationship with space and water. They are peaceful by nature with little experience of conflict. They therefore attach a great deal of importance to social cohesion and run their society, as far as the outside eye can see, like a beehive. Individuality exists, but not to any great extent. Each Akua lives his life in relation to the others and takes part in the water rites without trying to assert any of his own personal ideas, since this people's faith is underpinned by their very nature and nobody would ever question it.

The Akuas are naturally curious and mystical. They are fascinated by the treasures provided them by the Mother Ocean and interpret and analyze every sign and event to suit their beliefs. For example, the arrival of a spaceship in their planet's vicinity is seen as a manifestation of the Mother Ocean, a sign sent to incite a reaction. The priests hasten to interpret this sign by leading the Akuas to the sand lakes to commence the rituals.

Resources and Powers

The absence of water on Akuaridh deprives the extraterrestrials of all plant and animal life. There is no food on the planet. However, their incredible talent for mineral arts and crafts is such that they can make exceptionally beautiful and resistant objects, ornaments, armor, and weapons of all kinds. Their distinctive artistic gift makes the beauty of their sculptures unforgettable. Yet to date, there is no trade in them since Akuaridh has only just been discovered, lost as it was in the cosmic flow from Per-Beod.

It was only a recent change in the course of the energy current, placing Akuaridh under the undertow's cosmic swell, that finally proved the existence of these mineral creatures. Over the last ten years, the Akuas have entered a new era and now want to expand through the universe. They secretly hope to be carried though the space-ocean like shells, confident that they will eventually return to their home planet.

The Akuas' mental powers are similar to certain other mutants' powers. Associated with the liquid element and its exact opposite, these powers give the creatures the ability to sense the presence of water and influence the very consciousness of it with varying levels of intensity. This power invested in them by the cosmic currents cannot only move, heat, boil, and evaporate water, it can also be used by the priests to cause the total and instant disappearance of all water molecules, replacing them with a vacuum. The inversion of liquid flows such as blood is just one of the countless ways in which the Akuas can use their powers against any human foes they may come up against.

The Mnemonicians

Created by an exploding major planet, Mnemos drifts through space like an asteroid dotted with marshes and dying vegetation. This dark and rotting isle has been plunged into eternal darkness since losing its nearby star. It harbors no animal life, not even bacteria. Mnemos bears the name of the Mentrek in charge of wrapping up the Imperial observations file for this backwater. After long years of study and unsuccessful negotiations with a particularly hostile race of extraterrestrials, the Endoguard was dispatched to the area and pacified the zone in a lightning and particularly devastating attack. In next to no time, all that was left of the main planet was an asteroid called Mnemos by the mandated Mentreks, and everyone thought that life had been wiped out forever.

It wasn't until the tragic meeting between a Terra 877 inhabitant and a Mnemos "envoy" that anyone realized, after long and fastidious crosschecks, that the Mentrek report was not altogether accurate. Although all life was ostensibly extinct, the asteroid had undergone an unforeseeable change and, like the afterlife observed with the construction of the Endocities by the Techno-Technos, had developed a new and most particular life form. The asteroid had become a planet… a living planet.

The awakening of Mnemos is not the only case of its kind in the universe, but it happened so suddenly that the asteroid found itself not only with life, but also with an intuitive awareness of its own makeup. The newborn Mnemos already knew for certain that it could only survive and exist at the very best as a fragment of afterlife drifting in the stellar vacuum. This fatalism explains both the planet's total absence of life with its putrid marshes and twisted roots and the appearance of phenomena now known as "Mnemonicians."

Born of a dying star's despair, the Mnemonicians are not so much creatures as life forms, manifestations of Mnemos' vital essence and its refusal to die even though it knew full well it was alone and its destruction inevitable. Unable to accept that it was incapable of making or giving birth to anything sustainable, the star's consciousness just let these phenomena "be," like the twisted and uncontrollable vegetation that covers the surface of Mnemos. Nostalgic Mnemos has despite itself given birth to retrospective beings whose only way of existing and surviving was to become an integral part of this backwards march. Much like chameleons camouflage themselves by taking on the appearance of their environment, so the Mnemonicians assimilate and become… memories.

Physical Characteristics

When they first appear, rather than when they are "born," the Mnemonicians have no tangible or even describable physical form. At most, they are energy currents, waves, flows of existence that aimlessly wander across the body of their Father-Mother star until they find and absorb a memory. They are incapable of communicating either among themselves or with any other form of consciousness. They have no personal awareness until they have materialized. They neither feel, understand, nor perceive any of the information that comes their way.

The Galactic Ambassadors

After a long phase of galactic expansion sown with conquests, territorial wars, and brutal protests from worlds that are still free from all economic adherence, the Empire entered into an era of relative stability. Thus, it has adopted the appearance of a diplomatic corps in charge of relations with inhabited planets, either located within the borders of the Endo-fringe or beyond the Empire's frontiers. A bit of reflection and observation allows one to realize that these ambassadors really only serve in preparing future treaties and economic accords with the Empire… and in clearing the ground before the dispatching of an Endoguard squad.

Habitat

The notion of habitat is irrelevant on this planet. The Mnemonicians just aimlessly wander across Mnemos' surface, and the star bears no other life form. Yet it is hard to believe there is no life when you see the incredible swampy jungle with its outsized trees and putrid lakes full of black water. The water and the absence of any biological toxins make the atmosphere breathable. Mnemos has everything it needs to make it a viable star, at least for anyone who can put up with the death-like ambience.

Psychological Profile

The Mnemonicians only become aware once they are incarnated and materialize in the form of a memory. Although some of them become inanimate, but conscious, objects, the vast majority of the lifeforms look and think like conscious, intelligent beings. They seem to prefer for those who have the use of speech and any other form of communication. Once materialized, the Mnemonicians really "become" the object of the memory that they have intercepted and copy its nature, motivations, desires, fears, and so on.

Resources and Powers

The Mnemonicians use their amazing replicating skills to echo a memory, take on its form, and be-come its image. Whenever an explorer sleeps on the planet Mnemos, sleep often weakens their mental defenses, and increased psychic activity brings up more memories, providing a strong chance that a Mnemonician will be made by the retrograde spiritual waves. In which case, an exact replica of the man or woman in the memory will be created.

Replication takes just a few hours. The Mnemonician first takes on the appearance of a silhouette of pure energy, as if it were made of solidified mercury, before adding in endlessly finer and more accurate details that eventually transform it into the being in the memory. Once made, the Mnemonician no longer exists, but the "copied" subject now has a spitting image.

It's not hard to imagine how this incredible faculty could be put to a military and political use in espionage, war and diplomatic alliances. Fortunately, although the existence of Mnemos and the Mnemonicians is known, few seem to have yet made the connection between the planet and its sole creatures. Yet the fact that the Mnemonicians are made of pure energy means that they are not confined to their home star. They can sneak Mnemos roots into the spaceship reactors, holds, and cabins of explorers and travelers passing through the sidereal vacuum.

Alien Description Guide

Roll the designated number of dice (do not include the Wild Die) after the characteristic to randomly generate a new alien. If the result is "other," then you may either come up with your own, or roll twice more (rerolling if the result comes up "other") and combine the two. Only roll in the Powers categories if the Powers Physical Characteristics indicates for you to do that. The game master determines the exact effects of each power.

Origin and Environment

Origin (2D6): ectoplasmic, elementary (water, fire, gas, mineral), avian, insectoid, mammal, reptilian, ichthyoid, technological, plant, magic, other.

Native Environment (2D6): ethereal, corrosive (mercury, magma, acid, etc.), gaseous/air, aquatic, terrestrial, space, extradimensional (parallel dimensions, dreams, nightmares, time, interspace, etc.), other.

Physical Characteristics

Form (2D6): ovoid, cubic, slender, flat, animal (avian, reptilian, fish, etc.), humanoid, gaseous, skeletal, liquid, ethereal, other.

Limbs (1D6): arms/legs, tentacles, fins, claws, pincers, other.

Additional Limbs (1D6): wings, tail, heads, extra limbs, other.

Skin: feathers, hide, shell, quills, hair, flesh, mineral, none, other.

Distinctive Characteristic (1D6): odor, aura, color, unusual appearance (magnificent, monstrous, etc.), pecular mannerism, other.

Power (1D6): life, movement, mental, perception, physical, none.

Powers

Life (1D6): short-lived, limited regeneration, long, extreme, immortality, other.

Mental Power (1D6): magic, psionic, element control, spirit contact, temporal control, other.

Movement (1D6): flight, teletransportation, swimming, jumping interdimensional flight, other.

Perception (1D6): infrared, radar, sonar, X-rays, extrasensorial, other.

Physical Power (1D6): invisibility, immateriality, mimicry, polymorphism, chemical excretion, other.

Other Considerations

Although there are too many variations for which to give tables, here are some other characteristics you should consider describing for your new alien: normal behavior; average lifespan; average height (adults, children); average weight (adults, children); organs (eyes, nose, mouth, snout, hands, hoofs, tongue, vital points, heart, etc.); movement; key cultural features (housing, eating preferences, social preferences, etc.).

Mutants

Far from the aristocratic palaces and Prez-cloning centers, there lives an underclass excluded by an appearance-based society and shunned by the cult of pure blood and noble lineage. Mutants born either by accident or from a bungled genetic experiment are now a common sight on the streets of the Endocities. Although still technically "human" from various physical and mental points of view, the representatives of these new species who appeared with the first pan-Techno terraformation sites are rarely seen as such. They only survive because they are more or less tolerated.

Sources of Mutation

Humanity and Mutation

"Mutants" are defined as all living beings whose genetic code has been changed, producing characteristics and faculties unseen or less pronounced among the other represent-atives of their species. So although a man with four arms is obviously a mutant, these changes can apply to particularities already found in a species, such as the growth of long soft hair all over the body and the spectacular development of physical and mental attributes such as ESP, heat resistance, and skin pigmentation.

It is rare to find mutants with no physical symptoms of their mutation. Although many of these genetic changes are also mental and psychological, the body nearly always suffers an assault that forces it to react by developing growths, deformities, and conspicuous abnormalities. This results in the mutants being stared at and judged by their fellow citizens to the point of exclusion and segregation, which has prompted them to form mutant power movements and abnormality cults. So although having physical and mental mutations can quickly make you an outcast from human society, not having any mutations can just as easily exclude the human judged "impure" because of his total lack of genetic development.

In the extreme universe of the Metabarons, mutations have virtually infinite manifestations and effects for both mutants and their contemporaries. These physical and mental changes range from extra and wasted limbs to the most devastating mental powers. They can turn a human into a real alien — a genetic anomaly totally out of phase with his environment, his lost nature… and his peers.

Mutagenic Factors

To both mutants and men, the type of mutation is often less important than its expression. However, a detailed scientific study of this phenomenon reveals the extent to which the source of mutations — the famous "mutagenic factors" — are key to how they are physically expressed and affect the mutant's organism and psychology.

Although all the genetic mixing and matching that goes on distorts even the most basic calculations, three major sources of mutation have been identified that are capable of forcing an organism to spontaneously change abnormally: the repercussions of pan-Techno terraform-ation, the influence of science on the body, and cosmic energies.

The first mutagenic force is found in the universe's fundamental energies. These uncontrollable currents, long invisible to the mortal eye and beyond mortal comprehension, have been causing species and minds to evolve since the beginning of time. They are behind not only a whole host of mutations, but also the birth of races now called"alien." Given their ability to create a multigene-rational leap in Darwin's theory of evolution, it is easy to understand how these vital forces can alter the genetic characteristics of a race on a smaller scale.

More recently, the development of physical, chemical, and genetic sciences led to the appearance of a new form of mutation caused by radiation, exposure to artificial mutagenic agents, and programmed genetic modifications. This opened the door for a whole new brand of physiological changes. This explains how, when the initial genetic experiments were carried out, "mutation" was first really defined as an external influence on a living being's mind and body. The effects of building Endocities on inhabited planets are a perfect example of this. However, the chemical substances, radiation effects, and genetic modifications instigated by the Techno-Technos and the Shabda-Ouds also come under this heading of "technological" mutations.

This does mean that a person can be outwardly human while, inwardly, a designer being with abilities far beyond mortal possibilities. Nonetheless, remember the social pressures against mutants among those in power. Once a person exposes these powers by using them, he is a mutant waiting to be outed. In the universe of the Metabarons, no closet, however deep, is proof against the data intrusions of those wishing to learn secrets. The knowledge can be expensive to gain, but the pillars of society have vast resources and all the time in the world.

The Pan-Techno Influence

The Terraformation Process

The Techno-Techno robots can complete their mind-blowing terraformation work in just over one month, at the end of which the planet has been gutted and stripped of all vital substances and energy. So it's not hard to imagine the unbelievable violence of the process and its repercussions on the balance of life established and maintained by millions of years of slow evolution. This violence is glaring in the draining itself and the suffering inflicted on the star, with its raped elements and denigrated energies sucked up and subjugated to the will of technology and the demands of humankind.

Once the inhabitants of the Endocities have settled in behind the brand new walls of their new prison, few realize how their host planet has been ravaged. Further violence then sets in, fuelled by the Necro-Dream and humanity's natural vices, and everyone seems oblivious

to the effects of their settlement there. Yet there are many manifestations of these unsuspected after-effects. Top of the list are the mutants.

Although all life is sucked up, bled dry, and mercilessly hunted down by the pan-Techno machinery right down to the planet's core, every terraformed planet has managed to hold onto a vital spark — an energy that, like a memory drives revenge or forgiveness, becomes an irrepressible vestige, and spearheads the birth of new phenomena: the mutations.

The Crados

The Crados are the chief living evidence of this unsuspected survival born of the life's determination to "be" and endure. These first-generation mutants haunt the underground levels far below the machinery and the Acid Lake. The vast majority of the population believes the Crados to be mere myth. Rare are those who know they exist and believe in the Armageddon prophecy: the day when "the underworld will rise back up to the surface."

Behind the Crados' filthy, ugly mask forged by the atrocious physical mutations caused by the toxic waste in the acid lake, they harbor a last fragment of humanity reminiscent of their sacrifice and true nature. It is a very sad secret. Although everyone believes that they were born of the pollution generated by the Endocities, the Crados are no less than the first terraformation workers abandoned on the planet and imprisoned in the darkest depths of the earth in a maze of caves hidden from prying eyes. Hardly have they been stripped of life, when the planets chosen to host an Endocity find their first inhabitants sacrificed on the altar of secrecy and its demands.

It is not impossible to see a subtle variation in the extent of Crado mutation and organization in each Endocity, but all of these "communities" suffer from the same physical and mental deformities. The Crados are slowly transformed from humans into humanoids by the combined effect of radiation, mutagenic outflows, and toxic waste from the Acid Lake that pumps the food and industrial waste it cannot handle from the Endocities into the underground caves. The Crados' orange-hued, red and brown-spotted skin and vague features give them the repulsive look of spiritless mutants, unlike animal hybrids such as the man-dogs whose animal characteristics give them a certain allure of pride and nobility.

Outcasts from a society they helped to build, the Crados are seen as a "necessary nuisance" by the Techno-Technos who abandoned them to evolve on their own and have now designed specialized robot units to hunt them down. They are hounded from the darkest corner of each Endocity and imprisoned. Yet still they manage to survive, grow, and band together under the leadership of warrior-chiefs. There might be grounds for the fears of their return to the surface after all.

Knock-on Mutations

The Crados stuck in the heart of the terraformed planets are not the only mutants around. The land development and vital energy absorption process creates an imbalance that combined with industrial waste creates many mutagenic factors and just as many mutant species. These mutations due directly to the Techno-Technos' influence on the planets are seen in varying degrees of change, transformation and physiological, biological, organic and psychological developments. Skin coloring, extra, missing and/or wasted limbs and organs, and diminished physical and mental faculties are all examples of what a birth on these terraformed planets can produce. Yet the Magnarmada's intervention does not explain everything. An incredible number of factors are involved in addition to the afterlife effect. However, the very birth of the Endocities is in itself a more definite and unpredictable mutagenic factor than any external influence.

Mutants in Human Society

Even if the extra-terrestrials incite an evident mistrust among humans, when all is said and done, these inhabitants of faraway planets still remain relatively well accepted by the general population. This however, is not the case with the mutants. Looked upon as the dregs of society, classed even lower than animals on the scale of value and consideration, the mutants live in recluse, are often hunted, and are generally not recognized as human beings with the exception of a few who share their everyday life. For several decades now, these pariahs of human evolution have started to organize themselves, through the means of illegal cults and common values in which they demand recognition of their status and nature. These unauthorized religions are of course ruthlessly persecuted by the Techno-Technos and the Endocity Hunchbacks.

The Evolutionary Cycle

You only need to glance at the history of the universe to realize that mutants were around well before the first Endocity was built. These mutants, altered by a combination of cosmic forces and radiation from technological materials, or born of genetic modification and crossbreeding incompatible species, continue to be born and live outside the main center of Techno-Techno activity.

The description of the main mutagenic factors gives a general idea of the possibilities. However, it is safe to assume that there are as many varieties and manifestations as there are sources of mutations.

Side Effects

Much like cures are found as illnesses and diseases appear, the ongoing specialization in drugs, treatments, preventive patches, vaccines and other medical care for the populations goes hand in hand with a growing number of side effects and unexpected mutations. It must be said, however, that the Techno-Technos are also capable of using drugs to deliberately provoke these side effects. The disorders caused by this external action on the organ-

ism are manifold and often irreversible. They range from a rash and scaly skin through the loss of certain faculties and the spectacular development of others to major organ dysfunction, skeletal contraction and the complete disruption of the immune system.

The effects of these ingestions and treatments are so striking that they merit being put into their own mutational category. However, they are similar to other mutagenic factors associated with the consumption of food products, chemical substances, synthetic drugs and so on. With the exception of the prohibitively expensive quality products, the purchase of which is strictly regulated, most chemical-based foodstuffs bear a risk of side effects due to their poor quality, unsuitability to the organism and excessively high chemical content, or due to the organism itself reacting violently if it has already been affected by another mutagenic source. The mutational principle is so complex that the combined effects of medicine, narcotics, exposure to minute radiation and a long stay in the lower levels can create a new mutagenic factor when none of these four factors alone could have triggered the slightest reaction in the organism.

Radiation

Although the consequences of ingesting mutagenic or quite simply toxic substances seem obvious, the development of chemical sciences to power vehicles and ships, provide energy and produce biological weapons has created infinite sources of radiation with great mutagenic potential. When the batteries are flat and the weapons emptied and discarded on the battlefield, the toxins remain in contact with the oxygen capable of affecting all living organisms: animal, vegetable and mineral.

This irradiation affects more external appearances since the directly exposed body generally suffers first-degree mutations. Yet where the radiation is particularly strong and damaging, mutations can reach deeper into the body to affect the vital core, metabolism and senses, instead of just attacking the skin and external organs.

The Crados are a perfect example of such prolonged exposure to toxic fumes, making it easy to imagine the potential effects of voluntary and calculated exposure to provoke specific mutations.

Genetics

Genetic engineering is now banned in the Empire. Yet it is highly advanced despite the fact that experiments have dropped sharply since the golden age of the Techno-Technos and the Shabda-Oud some ten thousand years ago. Seen as a potential leap forward in man's evolution, this science with its endless variety of applications has triggered a race for knowledge that annually increases the potential for transplants, crossbreeding and molecular alterations tenfold. The Techno-Technos and their erstwhile sisters — the Shabda-Oud, still have the ability to encode, program and alter any genetic sequence to give life to new species today. Yet they don't even need to break the Empire's law against genetic engineering. You'd have to be blind not to notice the fruits of their terrible past experiments on street corners everywhere.

By far the best examples of the Techno-Technos' genetic influence on life are the man/animal crossbreeds well known among the Endocity inhabitants and valued by the Hunchbacks for their raids. The pan-Techno laboratory scientists designed these mix-and-match species with their endlessly changeable physical and mental characteristics from the isolation of two species' genes. Man-dogs, man-cats, man-sharks and man-snails are just a few examples of the possibilities for these genetically programmed mutants with their countless crossbreeds and hybrids. In addition to their physical particularities, they all seem to possess capacities associated with their animal nature. The man-dogs have a canine sense of smell and reflexes combined with human consciousness and language. It's not for nothing that many of these mutants have joined the ranks of the pirates and mercenaries — not only to make the most of their physical advantages, but also to hide from prying eyes and unrelentless hounding by the powers that be.

Cosmic Forces

Beyond man's grasp is a mutational vector that is impossible to analyze objectively in its entirety. It has been influencing the evolution of life since the beginning of time. Each of our universe's six Gateways is both source and transmitter for a flow of bipolar energy charged with an element and its exact opposite. This energy crosses space, divides, rebounds and alters when it comes into contact with other currents, triggering marvels and mutations. The six flows of energy from the Gateways are incompatible with one another, and naturally and instinctively seek to consume and annihilate each other. The planets submerged in or crossed by one or more of these currents are exposed to all sorts of influences, from mere climatic change to the severest mutations. Many races defined by man as "extraterrestrial" are, from many points of view, mutant versions of species that could once well have been human… which gives a whole new meaning to the term "humanoid extraterrestrial races."

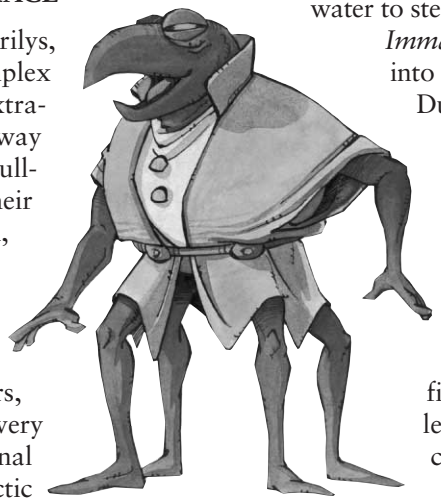
The currents from the Gateways travel through space like a cyclopean wave — a hungry cosmic liquid tongue that sweeps through worlds, engulfs

Captian Kaïman

Regarded as a veritable living legend by the Empire's inhabitants as well as his own men, who vow their boundless fidelity and admiration to him, the head of the Shipwreckers owes part of his reputation to his mutant nature and the other to the history that goes with it. Originally from a noble family, this man upon whom all life had once smiled, was victim of a terrible mutation that gave him reptilian eyes, a long serpent's tail, and extraordinary physical abilities. This in exchange for his happiness and the protection of his loved ones. Detested and chased from his family, he wanders today in space, motivated by a vengeance as cold as the blood that runs through his reptilian veins.

cradles of life and recedes like a tide, taking with it the mercilessly devoured fragments of life. The ebb of these waves is charged with an energy opposite to the flow — just like night follows day in the cycle of time. This ebb moves in the opposite direction towards the Gateway, creating a depression and devastating waves of turbulence capable of provoking more appalling mutations than any technology. Mutation, in this case, is seen in terms of degeneration and the negative influence on an organism. The passing of the flows creates an upheaval that, although capable of awaking the spirit and creating sensitivity undreamed of by the cosmic energies, locks the body in an evolution that nothing, not even the all-powerful pan-Techno technology, can curb or alter. These influences are called "paleo-salmonesque forces."

The Bergs, an Unusual Race



Formerly parrots originating from Artrilys, the Bergs are the fruit of a long and complex evolutionary process. Considered to be extraterrestrials, as they are natives of a faraway planet, these uncommon creatures are full-fledged mutants, taking into account their evolution, their method of reproduction, and the cyclic laws which govern their changes in body and essence. The Bergs change their physical form with the " Proto-Queen" Barbarrah's reproduction cycle. About every fifteen standard years, she lays the eggs for 78 billion Bergs. Every 24,000 years, during what these exceptional mutants call their "golden age," the galactic entity which is their queen generates and forms a new, evolved race, without any reference to the old one. Their physical appearance is radically different, just as their manner of communication and their customs.

At every egg laying season, the Proto-Queen Barbarrah gives birth to billions of clones from her sole inseminator, a Berg judged worthy of ensuring the perpetuity of his race during the Great Quinquennial Festival — where combats and festivities take place to designate the "reproducer." Taking into account that a Berg year consists of 825 standard days, the dazzling evolutionary changes that occur among the Bergs are considered outstanding in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of outside observers, who must possess a vast knowledge of evolution in order to distinguish a new mutation of the Berg race from a still unknown ordinary extraterrestrial race.

Today, after numerous mutations, the Bergs live in complete autocratic rule in the Atrilii three sun system, under apparently peaceful and relatively civilized circumstances. On their Mother Planet, Ourgar-Gan, Barbarrah the Matrix resides in the depths of Ouror the Ant's Nest, and lives ruled by the rhythm of her reproduction cycles and mystic dreams. According to space voyagers and the few mentreks well versed in Berg study, the Proto-Queen is waiting for the Advent of two prophecies: the coming of the next Golden Age Inseminator, who will give shape and life to the mutation of his people, and the Berg's expansion into vulnerable regions of the human Empire.

It is said, that the arrival of the Berg people in the Endofringe will sound the irremediable destruction of the Empire. For their technology is so particular, founded on secrets unknown to humans, that its effect on the Techno-Technos protection shields would be similar to the devastating outcome of an explosive used against medieval armor.

Special Abilities

Here are game mechanics for a few of the more popular special abilities found in mutants and aliens.

Elemental Control: The alien or mutant can manipulate one type of element, such as earth, air, fire, or water. The exact nature of the control should be determined prior to using the character. Examples of effects include turning a light breeze into a gust, causing small tremors, turning water to steam or ice, or affecting preexisting fires.

Immateriality: The alien can change himself into a gaseous form for up to one minute. During that time, +7D is added to *Strength* for the purpose of resisting damage—but his movement rate is halved. He cannot move through solid objects but can go through small openings (like keyholes). He cannot carry anything with him or perform actions that require physical activity or speaking.

Enhanced Sense: One of the alien's five senses is heightened to abnormal levels. Any relevant skill totals are increased by 1D.

Infravision/Ultravision: The alien can see in the dark, either through the use of infravision or ultravision. Infravision allows the alien to see changes in heat, while ultravision gives the alien a straight +2 to all *Perception* checks in the dark because she makes the most of light or sees in some other such way.

Invisibility: The alien is transparent (+3D to all *hide* rolls). This also means that under most circumstances, others may not make *Perception* attempts to detect the alien. *Perception* rolls may only be made if the agent or cast member has a reason to believe the invisible alien is there—and then only at great difficulty.

Limited Regeneration: The alien gains back one body point per round. Aliens who can grow back lost body parts are also classified under this special ability.

Natural Armor: The alien's skin is very tough, he has some sort of shell or exoskeleton, or some resistance to injury. The alien receives +1D to *Strength* rolls to resist damage.

Natural Weaponry: The alien has some sort of natural weapon—claws, pincers, and the like—that adds +2D to her *Strength* when determining her damage when attacking with that weapon. It is possible to have more than one natural weapon.

Teletransportation: The alien can teleport up to ten meters away. He must be able to see his destination clearly. In combat, this takes one round, and he can only take with him what he has on his body at the time.

The Major Forces

The universe is known as the immeasurable dimension where time and space, as conceived within the limitations of our minds, is a minuscule piece of an insanely gigantic baroque puzzle. The universe is crossed in every direction by ultra-powerful force currents, prechaotic energies, and active waves able to displace galaxies in a moment's time. Of course, these flux do not permanently reveal themselves in the material dimension, but are present in the latent state, and those who know how to master them are able to draw from a source so wonderful that it inevitably appears to be magic.

Discovering the origin of all these forces is a task that would drive even the greatest of the rationalist wizards mad. The forces are related to the very substance of the universe, the first and last mystery, and some are even remnants of what there was before. Nevertheless, parts of them have been clearly identified. The way they work in this universe is understood, as well how they are invoked and by whom. This information is only known by a few rare initiates, the force's disciples who most often ignore and indeed deny the existence of other immanent powers in the universe.

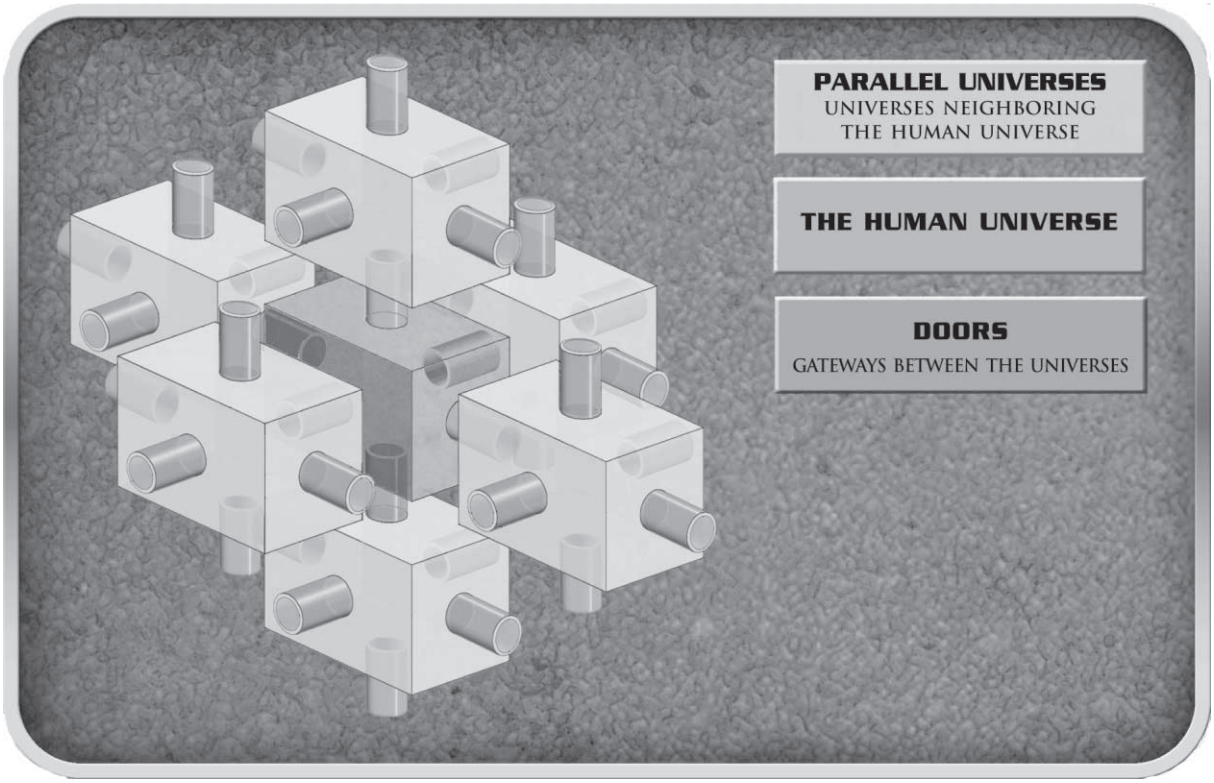
The Six Doors and Their Guardians

Titanic space, parallele piped in form, resembles a giant brick. The universe thus presents six sides, which make up its exterior boundaries. Each side is like an impervious membrane which hermetically seals our universe and prevents its material and immaterial fluids from flowing over into neighboring universes. Each of the six sides are in direct contact with another parallele-piped form, as the universes are schematically regrouped and stacked like a wall of bricks. Knowing that the universes are tremendous masses of energy in a state of constant expansion, it is absolutely vital to have a valve present, eliminating the risk of the whole smashing itself into pieces. And so, if by natural coincidence, a quirk of the elements, or an example of the Creator of Creators' cautious planning, passages have been provided in each of the six faces of every universe, and their task is to regulate the great energy currents that continuously cut across space.

These passages or "doors" shouldn't be carelessly left open, for each universe risks losing its identity by becoming incorporated into a universal conglomeration that is constantly growing more immense. The six doors are therefore entrusted to the vigilance of six custodians, who carefully watch that their mission of regulation is well executed. Finally, so as to avoid the doors' attracting the curiosity of the crowds, they blend into their surroundings and are even fashioned on a level of reality that eludes those beings limited solely to a material reality.

The Principle of Contrary Forces

Each door is associated with a specific force, related to the nature of the two universes it links. At the point of contact, the two universes present characteristics that are strictly opposite, so that their junction is ensured by a form of polarity that cannot be broken. Strictly speaking, it is not a question of a physical threshold that someone



could cross with his two feet, but rather a conceptual passage, the image of a breach between two dimensions. This hazy and labyrinthine zone is a mortal trap for those who thoughtlessly risk it. One can indefinitely wander there, stuck forever between two dimensions and two realities. In fact, only the guardians have the keys and know-how to pass from one universe to the next. More than Cerberus, they are rather like the impartial Charon, free servants of the universes, from which they draw their strength. And although their force is taken from this source, they are not enslaved to it.

Judged by human considerations, their powers are enormous, colossal, almost divine. But differing from the gods, they have no interest in the destiny of people and things. Neither are they immortal. To be more precise, they can exist only as the physical incarnation of a mortal being.

In this almost mystic configuration, the guardians fulfill their role according to the dictates of their goodwill. Some quite readily lend a sympathetic ear to lesser creatures, such as humans, whereas, others watch that they remain hidden with the greatest care, maintaining a veil of secrecy over the door they guard.

About Major Energies

By nature, the forces and energies present in the universe can be beneficial, harmful, or uncontrollable, that is to say disconnected from all good or bad will. The acquisition of an energy implies the observation of three imperative conditions:

1) One must have the will to acquire this energy. With the exception of rare examples, the forces ignore those who ignore them.

2) A journey must be undertaken — an interior voyage or expedition, strictly speaking — to understand that one can obtain it.

3) One must accept the changes that the energy inevitably produces once absorbed.

The Doors

Well beyond the outer limits of the universe is the confines zone where density reaches an absolute summit, and the smallest hydrogen atom represents such a considerable mass that elsewhere, its weight alone would be enough to wipe out an entire planet. On the human scale, the zone's recorded pressure and duress are immeasurably excessive. Moreover, apart from a few rather strange creatures such as the pachydermic jellyfish, no sign of life can be found. The rare exploratory missions that have made it to the zone have never returned. Yet, very near, behind a fine and perfectly impermeable membrane, other confines open out where the density is so slight that even celestial bodies have no weight. This thin membrane constitutes an absolutely impassable boundary.

Mardador

In our universe, there is a door called Mardador, which places two antagonistic zones in contact with one another. Physically, Mardador cannot be found anywhere; searching for it is a futile quest. In fact, it only exists on a level of reality that can solely be invoked by its guardian. The bird Gangez was this guardian, but his flesh and blood body have been destroyed. Now, he lives in the soul of the Metabaron, with whom he is one. Starting from the very first fusion with Dayal de Castaka, Gangez has been passed on from generation to generation within each of the Castakas, transmitted with the metabaronic powers at the end of the final combat between father and son. Today, the current Metabaron carries Gangez within him, and he is the Mardador custodian. But the Metabaron is not a kindly guardian, and the door is reserved for his personal use. Even if epiphyte, the wondrous substance associated with the door, has long since been sold to the Empire, the Metabaron does not need such an artifact to draw directly from the source of legendary powers he possesses within himself. Besides, the supplies of natural epiphyte have been exhausted, with the exception of the rare reserves held respectively by the four pillars of the Empire. Synthetic epiphyte made from bikramen does no better than mimic the antigravitational properties of the natural substance. It possesses none of the other miraculous properties associated with natural epiphyte. As the Mardador guardian, the Metabaron has to himself access to these wonders.

Temper-Ut

Elsewhere in the universe, there exists a frontier between the hot confines and the freezing limits. The passage from one to the other is the Temper-Ut door, guarded by Uakl. To this day, the guardian's physical metamorphosis has not been located, nor has the point of access to the door been found. The guardian Uakl is a one-eyed tortoise, completely made up of mercury. He lives on a metallic asteroid with a constant temperature close to absolute zero. The cold of this glacial environment serves to preserve the cohesion of his organism, for if he were exposed to heat, he would melt like snow in the sun. Uakl possesses the secret to temperature modification. He is wholly composed of mercury which concentrates his power, permitting him to act upon atmosphere and climate. A drop of mercury taken from his body enables one to acquire a part of his power. The greater the quantity of mercury, the greater the concentration of power. However, Uakl's conscious and essence, which give access to a dimension as great as a universe, are fully contained in his only eye. Uakl is mortal, but to destroy him, his eye must be destroyed. If Uakl's body came to be annihilated, his soul could find refuge in the spirit of a consenting being with whom it would be in complete accord.

Lucioh

Between the limits of shadow and light, Lucioh is the door which leads from obscurity to light. Ophidat, the guardian, is a triple reptilian entity made up of three serpents of bronze, silver and gold with scales that are alternatively dark and bright. They are called the three Bodras.

In addition to their mastery of light and darkness, Ophidat possesses the secret to a wonderfully powerful technology. Ophidat has been associated with the Techno-Techno order for a long time. He resides under the Techno-Temple altar on Central Planet. The Church of the Industrial Saints draws its technological power from this exceptional affinity. Yet, no dignitary of the order, not even the supreme Techno-Pope, has ever entered into communion with the triple entity; and despite its power, the Techno-Techno order is far from holding all of the power that the Ophidat has to offer. In fact, the Church of the Industrial Saints is in reality an instrument in the hands of a dark force, concealed in the shadows.

Per-Beod

The door that leads from the dry borders of our universe to the liquid confines of one of the six neighboring universes is called Per-Beod. It is placed under the close watch of the guardian Bemb, a giant oyster who possesses the absolute source, the secret mastery of water. A long time ago, at the dawn of the Ekonomat's legendary history, the planet which became Neo-Knox was dying under the scalding rays of its sun. And that is precisely when a dying Bemb communicated his secrets to the first sign of intelligent life that appeared to him. It turned out to be a delegation of wandering fugitives, looking for a promised land, a group of those who where going to build the Ekonomat. Since that time, the Ekonomat possesses the secret to water. Bemb's spirit was collected by one of the dignitaries, a member of the Midastik Chamber, whose identity is unknown.

Chonch

In the borders, there is a zone that is completely in relief, jutting out full of dips and bumps. The most breathtaking cliffs give way to the highest summits, riddled with needles that stand out like the points of a diamond. Through the door named Chonch, one passes into a smooth universe where the polished surfaces are like immense mirrors, soft and satiny. Ruante is the guardian of this door. To this day, she has not been discovered, frozen in a gangue of bluish ice where she has been kept for billions of standard years. Set in her mineral sepulcher, she roams in space carried by the stellar winds, plunged into a dream without end. She has the features of a young humanoid woman, immobile as a stone statue. Her hands, crossed over her breast, hold a small object — a little paintbrush in orikarb — which can modify at will the geographical relief of any world. But the Ruante's powers have many other aspects, because she can act upon the inert matter of the two universes. Her conscious is asleep, but a part of her spirit remains in an alert state, ready to intervene when necessary.

Doors and Their Guardians

Our universe is comprised of six doors, each placed under the care and protection of a guardian. A powerful secret, related to the nature of the two universes they link, is associated with each door. A substance, creature, or object capable of carrying out a concrete action in the material universe is also associated with each power.

Door	Guardian	Power	Substance, creature, or object of power
Mardador	Gangez	Mastery of gravity	Epiphyte, the fantastic, magical substance which voids gravity. Overexploited by the Empire, it is now practically nonexistent in its natural form.
Temper-Ut	Uakl	Temperature modification and alteration	A tortoise made of mercury allowing it to act upon climate, seasons, and temperature in all of its forms.
Lucioh	Ophidat	Control of light and darkness	The Ophidat's scales, renewed at every sloughing. Engraved on their scales are the mysteries of technological power.
Per-Beod	Bemb	Mastery of hydrogen, oxygen, and water	The Kist, a bladder containing an absolute and permanent water source, as well as the secret of mastering fluids.
Chonch	Ruante	Modification of geographical relief	A paintbrush in *orikarb,* which enables the one who is holding it to redesign the outlines of everything that reveals itself within one's view.
Puerko	Podrih-Do	Mastery of aroma chemistry	The pulp flower, a bud that grows at the end of the nose and allows one to act upon the tiniest inframolecular level of the aromatic chains.

Puerko

Finally, through the Puerko door one passes from the foul-smelling borders to emerge into a delicately perfumed zone, where the most subtle essences mix to enchant the senses. Podrih-Do is this door's guardian. A reptilian creature, endowed with the massive and powerful body of the Saurians, is enhanced by nine animated heads which each have an individual life. It lives buried in the swamps of the planet Sec-Hum from the Soto system in Terra Prima's galaxy. Three great and distinct races inhabit this geophysically strange planet: the Gords, Hireas, and Sueskins. These last people, also known by the name of the Odorizers, have always lived in the marshy strip that encircles Sec-Hum at its equator. As their primitive art attests, the Odoraters have since time immemorial revered the "Splendor of the Marshes." Formerly, they would sacrifice their hunting catch or the youngest members of the tribe to him. But a new link has been forged between Podrih-Do and the Odoraters. It is not really a pact but rather a relationship of subjection from which the religious feeling has disappeared and any thoughts of communion with the guardian are excluded. Podrih-Do allows the Odoraters to use certain of his minor powers, and manipulates them in order to guarantee his peace and quiet. Thus today, the Odoraters cultivate the pulp flower, mastering the mysteries of aromatic chemistry. This knowledge has rendered them indispensable to the Gords and the Hireas who are particularly sensitive to anything that pertains to scent, resulting in the unconscious domination of the two tribes. But Podrih-Do did not reveal to them the magnitude of his powers, because the total extent of his understanding of the most subtle workings of ether is so that he could control the suns and subjugate the galaxies.

The Influence of Chonch

During the period of chaos that marked the thirteenth and fourteenth millennia, there was an aftershock phase when the six universes' forces withdrew after having challenged and fought one another with rare violence. A particularly dismal reflux that returned towards the Chonch door brushed up against planet Linatys of the Pyllum system, where a peaceful population of farmers and hunters lived in relative harmony. Spurred on by shamanic priests who revered nature, the Linatys people soon gave themselves over to a more and more elaborate technology.

In less than a standard century's time, they had erased all of the planets geographical relief, making the surface of the planet as smooth as a lake in summer. After having reduced the mountains and hills, they undertook filling in the gulfs and valleys. Those who where opposed to the planet's destruction were the first to be buried alive. Every technological advance was accompanied by an increase in tyranny. The conquest of the entire system rapidly followed, excepting the colonized satellites who entered into rebellion. A homicidal rage of a size inconceivable only five centuries before swept through Pyllum in every sense of the word. Finally, engulfed by a cataclysmic implosion, it became a black hole.

Actions and Reactions of the Universes' Forces

With six doors scattered about space, and six universes massed around them, the Human Empire's universe is at the crossroads of numerous force currents thath sweep through the stellar void, pass one another and collide. At certain points in space, these flux join in titanic battles. In fact, being of very different natures, the forces tied to the neighboring universes are naturally antagonistic. It is not so much that these manifestations are incompatible among themselves — for example, cold could very well make do with light or darkness — but rather, the underlying wills which animate them are irreconcilable rivals. The part of the universe where they confront one another is a very disturbed place. It is the "current's nexus," or the eye of the storm, and the turmoil at times reaches an apex that causes the actual texture of the universe to experience extreme convulsions: black holes, stellar tsunamis, antimatter irruptions, etc. The powers at play defy human understanding, and even a being as invincible as the Metabaron — guardian of one of the six major sources of power — cannot confront these turbulences unscathed.

Of course, no living world nor entity can come away unharmed from contact with a nexus, nor more than a confrontation with a "plexus" (a current having a unique and singular force). If one of these forces crosses a system, brushing up against the outskirts of an inhabited system, all of the life in that zone finds itself affected. In particular, forms of intelligent life are subjected to its influence, or more precisely, its underlying will. Because the universes follow a logic of their own: they are driven by the instinct to conquer. In fact, without responding to a precise strategy, the universes and forces they diffuse are naturally cosmos devourers. Passing from one universe to another, each force, pushed by an invasive dynamic, strives to occupy all the space it finds in its course. "Magic" currents arise from the whirlwind that follows, whose effects are apparent everywhere, in the most varied of shapes and forms. For example, a religion practiced for millennia could suddenly take a new turn and fall prey to the control of the darkness, stench, scorching heat, or gravity. Initiates who are particularly advanced could discover new mysteries to invoke a power related to light, dryness, or geographical relief. Whatever it may be, the supernatural sweeps through as an expression of tremendous combat that the universe offers on a cosmic scale.

The exterior forces of the universe experience a moment of immobility when, after having completely un-

furled, they lose their momentum. Worn out by terrible battles, they then permeate themselves in the surrounding space, dispersing partially into the zone where the wave brought them. Whatever may occur, the reflux moment always comes next. A new masterful momentum calls the forces back to their original source. It is the paleo-salmonesque current of the six forces, a rising residual force that is exceedingly black. Regretfully, stopped short in their conquering course, the forces regain their intensity, trampling back across the regions already traversed with a malicious climatic vigor. When this happens, on the frequency of a cosmic scale — that is to say once every 10,000 years — entire systems are swallowed up in a chaotic, blind and wild fury.

Manipulating the Universe

Although this game is not intended to allow characters played on the level a Metabaron, characters can try to use the force they are attuned to to alter the world. Treat each act as an attempt at reality manipulation. The dice in a character's reality manipulation ability equals her Amarax Points times her *willpower* value. Use the guideliens on pages 104 of the rule book, but add +40 to whatever you choose (this accounts for the inerent ability of the universe to replus changes and remain the same). Thus, an easy manipulation (such as changing the number of rounds of ammunition are remaining in your opponent's weapon) is 45, while an incredible manipulation (the Metabaron breaching the Golden Planet's defense unscated and undetected) is 75 or more.

Other doors, Passages, and Minor Forces

Along with the great currents that cut through deep space, there are other manifestations that make themselves known. First of all, there are sporadic reshapings by the six cosmic forces. When these remnants (magnetic, psychic, sexual and others) are infused into a universe's system, they undergo a transformation dictated by the nature of their new environment. Their essence becomes another. They are no longer an expression of their original universe, nor are they the local force's reply. They form a new "strain." Sometimes these strains are hybrid, the fruit of a symbiotic encounter between different forces. Cut off from their original source, they eventually lose their intensity, but this modification is compensated with a greater affinity for the zone where they currently reign. This distinctive mystical union has strong repercussions on a local level, since the magic current steeps into the substance of space, the planet's ether, and the souls of living beings. Under its influence, religions practiced on inhabited worlds take on specific orientations, either favorable to life or contrarily becoming utterly morbid; the cosmogonic harmony itself responds with complete chaos or, alternately, finds a new equilibrium based on order.

In the same way that our universe is in direct contact with six other universes, each one of these neighboring universes is directly in contact with six other universes. By a process of natural circulation, exogenous forces coming from extremely distant space, sometimes bursting into zones of the Human Empire. And similarly to the six currents' remnants, they enter in turn into the cosmic vortex's furious whirling bringing about various side effects, inspiring to beings and systems with the macabre appetites of destructive conquest. Or to the contrary, they create a constructive and positive will. In certain examples, they communicate a creative energy that leads to a technological mastery or paves the road to mysterious occults.

Finally, in addition to the six doors that act as valves between the universes, a vast number of minor "valves" occasionally pop open under the pressure of frothing energies which make use of these openings to release their waves of force. The fate of star systems and the entities that populate them undergo either beneficial or disruptive impacts, depending upon the force's level of concentration. On the scale of the universe, their side effects are not as long-lasting as those of the great currents, but they are often more intense. It is as if suddenly, out of nowhere, a mad wind starts blowing, and a supernatural tornado lets loose.

The Creatures of the Breaches

Countless creatures burst upon our universe through breaches between the universes. The majority are native to the borders, where the extreme conditions give birth to monstrous chimeras. These are the pachydermic jellyfish, stellar skate manta fish that are as large as suns, or better yet, the cosmic cetaceans, or the Jejoh — those that were formerly revered by the Shabda-Oud. These entities are not by any means deities. Strictly speaking, they don't have any supernatural powers. Above all, they are lacking the awareness which would render their power more than just an ability. But the fact is that they are endowed with particular aptitudes of super-human size. They should be thought of as whimsical bubbles secreted by the universes, devoid of freewill, at times driven by purely physical desires and appetites, and always capable of extraordinary feats.

As the Shabda-Oud order has demonstrated, these creatures can be tamed into submission. Their power can be harnessed and used by other intelligent forms of life. Dominating this power, however, certainly is not enough to conquer all of the universe, but it opens up certain possibilities for imposing tyranny. The creature's force shows no sign or characteristics of a magic essence. It is just brute force, but what force it is!

Fluids and Currents

The diffused fluids that cross the universe have a more subtle and ephemeral power, as well as a particular affinity with the underlying system. This is notably the case with the universes' sexual energies, and their feminine or masculine essence. It is known that these great poles generate imperceptible fields, whose strong magnetic effects are quite visible and concrete. For example, it is under this influence that certain portions of space migrate from

time to time to get closer to a body or zone that attracts them. This particular form of harmony is also that which unifies the Metabaron and his Metacraft — a profound understanding that enables communication through pulsion and impulsion, drawing directly from the primal energy of life and death. Locally, these extremely volatile fluids can reach such a high level of concentration that they can inspire a religion or lead receptive beings into specific types of behavior. Their action is disassociated from all moral dimensions, to such an extent that worshiping femininity, for example, could lead either to a civilization of unsociable amazons, to triumphant males under the influence of egotistical chauvinist priests, or contrarily, to a society where the men pay tribute to woman's beauty, the women revere the proud virile monolith, and together they elaborate an extremely sophisticated peaceful eroticism.

In terms of strength, these emanations are far from being as devastating as the six door's grand flux, but combined with the interior force possessed by every individual, great things can be accomplished. The "Golden Flower" opened by Steelhead in the heart of the Golden Palace is a perfect illustration. Certainly, Steelhead is no ordinary human, but on this very day he invoked the supreme expression of femininity, and it was this force that harmed the reputedly invincible defenses of the Empire's nerve center. In the same way, each and every person can be in harmony with the sexual charge of the elements, nature, or the cosmos in order to reinforce and strengthen their will, drawing thereupon for a renewed vigor, and reaching never before explored areas of knowledge and power.

Cataloguing all of the strength vectors that cross the interstellar void or heel and list in a galaxy's gyron would be a Herculean task, but certain merit mention. It is notably the case with the "Blue Rose," that which is invoked by the Metabaron Aghnar to convince Oda that she is destined to be with him for all of eternity. It is not a matter of suggestion. It exerts no influence over her. It only reminds her that their union is already written on another level of reality. In fact, the Blue Rose is the universe's navel, its center of gravity, a place only accessible through dream, fantasy, and mystic thought. Consciously or unconsciously, every being carries within himself the memory of this place. Through dreamlike chance, or through long meditative work and awakening, one can go back there, recharge themselves, and develop their psychic abilities. In practice, the psychic dimension offered by the Blue Rose is akin to the Mind's Shadow that is mastered by the Shabda-Oud. The source is different, but the effect on the initiated human is comparable. Afterwards, the orientation taken by the newly acquired psychic strength, depends uniquely upon what one decides to do with it. It is there that it exists at a latent state, and whoever makes the effort to seek it out it, may attain it.

Ithis is a creature intimately linked to the universe. She is related to the Golden Flower, which is her metaphoric interpretation. As the essence of femininity, or more precisely of benevolent maternity, Ithis watches over humanity. When the course of events takes a wrong turn, she feels sadness, but she doesn't directly intervene, preferring subtle and indirect action. For example, Amourine is the substance that comes from flowers that blossom in the heart, the flowers of Ithis. Amourine enables a person to harmoniously reintegrate himself into the universe when life, the elements, and especially hostile forces have worked against him to disturb the equilibrium of his synchronicity with the environment. Indirectly, Ithis is an object of veneration to the Neuro-Emotional Church cult, who worship the Saint Amourine. It is unlikely that she accomplishes other, more direct acts in the lives of other worlds, but she can certainly give inspiration and open pathways for those who search for them.

The Carnido Star

During the twenty-second millennium, following the collapse of one of the borders' zones, a flux emanating from the force guarded by the guardian Uakl swept through the star system Carnido of the outlying Ranz Galaxy. The stellar bodies' path was disturbed, and the system's two viable planets experienced adverse but equally tragic ends. One approached Carnido, while the other was distanced from the star. The vegetation yellowed on the first planet, and soon nothing survived but a blue and poisonous lichen. Water became scarce. People died, and millions of animal and vegetable species disappeared. During this time, the second planet was plunged into a permanent glacial night.

While an inescapable end — within at best two centuries — seemed destined, the survivors of the two worlds experienced a desperate wake-up call. They were taken over with feverish activity. Those who were until this time idle and confident in the goodness of nature immersed themselves with zeal into study and research. The more they worked with fervor, the more their faith in a recourse was reinforced. Every day, life became harder, but major advances were realized: the two planets could communicate, then a probe was sent from one planet to the other. When their worlds became barren, the survivors had already taken refuge in a space station. And when the planets died, they were already long gone for the stars.

Mystical and Divine Powers

Beyond the cosmos — the devouring forces, conquering and greedy powers, and diffused flux that regulate or disturb the harmony of life in

the universe — there are other entities of divine essence that exist on a totally inaccessible level of reality yet are completely devoted to preserving the general equilibrium among all of the universes. Their motivations remain a mystery, but it is nevertheless certain that they emanate from Omphal, the eye creator, the pupil from which comes all existence. From this first and last site — point of the beginning and point of the end — came the Arraths, the guardians' guardians, those who keep a watch over the cohesion of the greater all, a whole so vast, that it can only be described on a divine scale. Not only do they possess the two Incals — the two faces of unique truth — but the Arraths are also the guardians of the guardians, which are in some ways distant projections of themselves in reality.

To fulfill their sacred mission — preserving life — the Arraths can intervene at any moment, in any universe. Generally, they appear as little grandfathers, good natured and patient. Despite the extensive powers at their disposal, they never act in a direct manner: they listen, consult, suggest, and direct. For example, it is they who instill the bit of moderation that curbs the Tenebrea's conquering drive. In the same way, when the galacto-barbarian wars bordered on the point of risking the pure and simple eradication of one or several universes, the Arraths encouraged the discovery of TRI-H technology, which would put an end to the conflict. This said, their presence in the life of the universes is extremely discrete, even if the existence of each universe is placed under their protective wing.

The Anishad-Oupah Door

This "door" is the "mythic intra-universe tunnel," the first river, that which flows across time and space, and whose every embankment leads toward a new universe. No one knows where to find this legendary tunnel, for its location is constantly changing, as unstable as the contours of the universe it services. Sometimes here, sometimes there, it only appears to those who are able to enter into symbiosis with the great all: "He who is one with the universe, he whose will is strong and who carries passion's burning desire in his heart."

Finally, the ultimate myth, hope of hopes… the Perfect Androgyne is the one for whom every form of life waits, to be lead towards an eternal Eden. Since the prophesy of Aptisto, the human preacher from Terra Prima — "Because it is said that the one who will unite the qualities of man and woman will be the Perfect Androgyne, the sacred Being adorned with all of the qualities of the mother and the father, will reign forever and lead humanity, by its sublime hand, towards destiny" — and maybe even before this prophesy, the myth of the Perfect Androgyne had already been a stake of power. Each great pillar of the Human Empire works toward giving birth to the one who could claim this title… But only in vain. The Perfect Androgyne has never been realized, and no Trans-Bourbon has ever been, no more Janus-Jana than His-Her predecessors. In fact, the realized ideal, the absolute communion between two principles, designates the ultimate and sole power, that which is behind the Omphal — the divine will that created everything.

But that has not prevented beings at once male and female to come into existence and even to rule over one of the most powerful governments in the universe — the Human Empire.

Cults and Religions

The universe is like a crucible into which a mischievous alchemist indiscriminately pours power grains in order to observe the reactions with wonder, astonishment or dismay. From this frothing and fiery cauldron come cults, beliefs and religions, which are all linked to one form of power or another. In practice, these faiths and institutions can assume diverse appearances: for some, they are instruments to serve their creations' ambitions, and for others, they represent a form of muddled hope, a threat or a sanctuary where one can find refuge when the whole universe has become mad.

The Church of the Industrial Saints (C.I.S.)

In the long list of mystical groups and sects, the order of the Techno-Technos is looked upon as a special case. Already, with its status as the official church of the Empire, it enjoys a unique position as a religion. An important part of the social life of the Empire's representatives who are scattered throughout the entire universe turn around the rites and rituals linked to the Techno-mystic: Technology Feast Day, Day of the Serpent, Days of the Tenebrae, Ovoid Easter, and so on. But that isn't all, because the C.I.S. distinguishes itself as well by its complete disinterest for anything that has to do with the depths of mysticism. Fervor shown for the Techno-Techno hierarchy is acceptable. Observing with a scrupulous rigor the obligations and duties imposed by the rites is once again okay. But to throw oneself blindly and entirely into a spiritual quest to give life meaning, to cultivate compassion, or to search out other values, higher and less material, than those given by the Saint Technology means running the risk of bringing upon oneself the Council Circuit's anger and disdain. The Empire's official cult has no use for metaphysics. It has no mystical thirst to quench. It has an Empire to tame.

Religious and Mystical Foundations

Yet, the Techno-Pontificate is thoroughly built upon those foundations with which churches are made. First of all, there had been one day a revelation. At the Techno-Techno origins are three representatives of the Guild, lost in deep space on a small asteroid, condemned survivors promised to an impending end. These three actually lived through a mystical experience that most often serves as a basis for belief in some divine entity. They looked death in the eye, sustained the limits of human existence, and conquered and vanquished, accepted their fate. Then suddenly, a power greater than themselves, a fantastic force came to save them. A feeling of gratitude and hope could have been born from this point. Faith was lurking nearby, and it could have swept through the hearts of people in all the galaxies. But nothing like that happened…

All the right ingredients were united, but the recipe just did not take. Coincidence or historical whim are not to blame. There exists a concrete explanation. For the force from which the Techno-Techno order draws its strength — the triple Ophidat guardian of the Lucioh door — is in the hands of a stronger will, the Tenebrae, which has no need to put hope in the hearts of people. Humans are fearful by nature. If they fear the beyond, there is no reason to reassure them. Moreover, bio-life is the Tenebrae's personal enemy, and the Tenebrea only thinks of its elimination. Thankfully, for human people and all living beings, the Tenebrea is not the only power in the universe, and it is obliged to make peace with other forces that protect it. Yet, discretely and steadfastly, the Church of the Industrial Saints spreads the Tenebrea's word, preparing the arrival of the Tenebrea and plotting for its greater glory.

For all of these reasons, the Techno-Techno order, despite its church status, cannot be considered as an institution that tries to convey hope or a message. But its power and omnipresence are such that it can sterilize and kill in the embryonic stage all or any remote impulses towards spiritual elevation. An absolute necessity in achieving humanity's muffled subservience, which is one of the Tenebrea's major objectives, as a prelude to other more radical actions, leaves no room for individual expression. Moral sloppiness — the Necro-Dream — favors these projects; whereas reaffirmation, faith, dignity and spiritual elevation are the obstacles that the Tenebrae must vanquish to maintain its domination over humanity while patiently waiting to eliminate them.

Mystical and Religious Actions

The Church of the Industrial Saints promises nothing. It brings no aide, no comfort, and leads no action to alleviate life's burdens or solve its difficulties. It does not attempt to solve life's

Techno-Techno Control

In the Endocities, the Techno-Technos' machine-assisted population control does not require coercive measures other than "surveying one's flock." Techno-Techno chapels and temples do exist, but it has not been necessary to make their frequentation an obligation. However, on worlds that elude their direct control — archaic planets where spontaneous animism is freely practiced, Colonial planets resistant to certain dogma, and Maganat planets where local despots privilege their own cult of personality — the supporters of the Church of the Industrial Saints take advantage of their status as the Empire's official cult to obtain privileges and prerogatives, imposing the Techno-Techno's supreme control over secular affairs.

mysteries, nor understand the divine in people, nor favor transcendence or elevation. The church especially does not protect the arts, and stirs no sacred inspirations in those who believe. To the contrary, it condemns and imposes with extreme rigor a quantity of rules as obscure as they are inflexible, which help to spread confusion in the follower's minds and flatter their lowest instincts. On the subject of morals, the Techno-Techno order is anything but rigid. For example, though their rules reprove intellectual curiosity, they strongly approve of depravation, unrestrained consumption of drugs and other psychotropic agents, and in a word, everything that distracts and diverts one from the highest to the lowest, most vile common denominator.

For lack of a veritable faith or want of a great mysticism, the pan-Techno-Church imposes an extremely ritualized cult agenda. All who belong to the order must be subjected to their principles of life, and their heavy and constraining ceremonials, with the objective of assuring blind devotion to technology. It is the same for the Techno-Techno minions or underlings as well as the dignitaries — Techno-Popes, Techno-Cardinals, Techno-Bishops — who are placed under the inflexible authority of the central computers and Techno-Centrix. Freewill has no place in the church, and all the followers' actions and doings are strictly controlled. This equally applies to laymen and institutions. Everywhere it can, the Church of the Industrial Saints imposes its hyper-hierarchical structure, as well as its numerous ceremonies and obligations.

Fundamentally, the Church of the Industrial Saints is not for humanity. The Techno-Technos are exploited by the Tenebrae with the goal of mastering the bio-elements, as emanations of life, and keeping them in a state of submission conducive to the arrival of the frozen reign of darkness. *Ové Tenebrae!*

Initiations and Achievements

When a novice is on her way to reaching the eighth level of awakening, at the eighth Mohn, she is called to the first Temple to undergo the final initiation and become a reverend-mother. This ultimate trial should give her access to new mysterious powers. Afterwards, the neo-reverend-mothers must certainly leave on a secret mission because they are never seen again…

The Neo-Shabda-Oud Order

After the destruction of the Temple on Planet Diamond and the Magons' invasion of the frozen planet, one might imagine that the order of the nun-sluts had disappeared forever. But, cloistered in the frozen sanctuary of the first Temple, built on the stellar ice floe at the exact spot where the initial Jejoh was discovered by the order's founders, the ten great Elders — ten sickly mummy-like keepers of the great Shabda secrets — were the order's only survivors. Their armed forces — the seven cetacyborgs and their legion of fresh and vigorous novices — had been reduced to an impotent, lifeless member. Yet there remained their legendary psychic power, fruit of the indefatigable labor of generations of priestess-witches.

Resurrection

If the Church of the Industrial Saints, despite its name, doesn't show any of the qualities generally attributed to religious congregations, the Neo-Shabda-Oud order is to the contrary, a community fully established on a mystical dimension. The ten founding members — grand elders and high-ranking initiates of the vanished order — live in a state of physical catalepsy, intimately joined by a powerful mental bond whose source represents the essence of the Neo-Shabda reality. In the battle against Metabaron Aghnar, they lost all of their technological treasures, reducing them to almost equals with the Techno-Technos. But this period is now ancient history, a nostalgic regret. For in this time of trial and utter destitution, they found the inspiration to build new arms that are potentially even more devastating than those that were lost.

Shabda mysticism is certainly not based on loving thy brother or neighbor. The Shabda are not altruistic. Today, like yesterday, their motivations remain the quest for power and the desire for strength. Even devoid of all empathy, they know how to find their way towards the mental strength that is lodged in each thinking being and master it. Formerly, spurred on by their Jejoh's sexual energy, they knew how to harness mental energy, but they have now brought this mastery to a never before imagined level. Living within fixed time allowed them the luxury to explore in extremely minute detail — virtually in a form of conscious energy — the mysterious resources of the brain. Patiently and methodically, they dissected and analyzed each lobe, each cortical zone, and established a precise topography of the eight "Mohn" points.

Accessing mental strength is achieved by a gradual awakening process of each one of these eight points. The operation, as delicate as it is spectacular, consists of introducing a long ebony wood needle probe into the brain. The ten Shabda-Oud elders, the Neo-Shabda reverends, became masters in the art of trephination. Each one of them wears a crown made up of eight ebony needle rods, placed according to a very specific arrangement, and each one has reached an extraordinary stage of psychic development. New cerebral regions are accessible to them, zones that until recently were unexplored and untouched, where they have found treasures. Now, in addition to the mortal mental fluid with which the Shabda-Oud overwhelms their enemies, they have supernatural telekinetic capacities at their disposal. Together, from a distance, they can act on matter in an absolutely terrifying manner.

Of course, the Shabda-Oud are still able to take control over and subjugate any unsuspecting creature, using simple hypno-suggestive impulses. Technology had escaped them, but they were able, in a very short period of time, to reconstruct an arsenal that wants nothing more than to sweep through and conquer the universe.

Recovery

At this stage of their renaissance, the Neo-Shabda-Ouds were confronted with diverse difficulties: they were banished from the Empire, where moreover they had hardly been tolerated, and they were only ten, isolated and above all, incapable of moving. To overcome these difficulties, they embarked on an active recruitment campaign. Evidently, the first and most difficult thing was to attract women to come all the way to their hideout. Once present, there was no doubt that they would be able to persuade them, but attractive action from a distance constituted a veritable challenge. They succeeded beyond their dreams. In fact, fate greatly favored their plan, and they caught a complete crew of Amazons in their net: ten magnificent soldiers, all determined and vigorous. A first series of initiations were started, and a minor trephination was carried out on the ten new recruits. The configuration of four needle rods placed in a semi-circle on the left side of the head is called "covenant." The novices do not become the elders' equals, because the "covenant" does not open the superior levels of mental mastery, but it does make them formidable witches and, above all, contributes to introducing them into a circle that they will never, ever leave.

These ten Neo-Shabda-Oud priestesses were then sent towards inhabited worlds on recruitment missions. Constrained to act with extreme discretion — they risked immediate execution if their affiliation with the Shabda-Oud came to be known — they concealed the needle rods that protruded from their heads under a white headdress. To this day, no one really knows exactly what they are, and in a universe where the most whimsical and weird dressing styles are abound, no one is surprised to see these cranial outgrowths. But even so, they scrupulously followed a prudent and cautious course. Thanks to their effective action and their intensified powers of persuasion, the Neo-Shabda-Oud order rapidly filled its ranks.

Three awakening centers were opened. They are directed in the greatest of secrecy by priestess-witches vested with the personality of a great elder. During the course of highly ritualized secret ceremonies, they implant an initial needle rod to open the first Mohn. The novices are then sent into the universe to become seasoned in leading a recruitment mission. Then, as they develop more and more into Neo-Shabdas, new needle rods are implanted and new cortical areas become accessible to them.

Today, the Neo-Shabda-Oud order counts thousands of followers in the universe. Isolated, they keep their veritable nature a well-guarded secret and prepare in the shadows the revival of the priestess-witches' splendor.

Scarification Rites

Inspired by traditional paleo-techniques from Terra Prima, the scarified tattoo is a procedure (extremely painful when carried out without anesthetics) that consists in applying a fine laser ray that has a psycho-electric charge capable of altering biochemical structure in biological tissue. The ray actually acts upon the melanin content of the deep epidermal layers. Contrary to paleo-scarification, it doesn't produce scar tissue folds but leaves an indelible mark, comparable to a birthmark. In dark skin, it leaves a light mark, whereas on light skin, a dark mark.

The Neuro-emotional Church and the Amourine Cult

The hope of the universe's damned, cult of the neglected, the Neuro-emotional Church assembles all those who society (in the most general sense of the word) ignore, despise, and would watch die without experiencing the slightest quiver. In the Endocities, this Church is the hope of the mutants and the desperate of the lower levels, and everywhere else, the miserable of the universe have the hope in their hearts of the Advent. But the Neuro-emotional Church is a banned and hunted cult. It is most alive in the Endocities, in the Subring and its GTO, as their priests are always mutants. But the Church is also present in space, on one planet or another, where a mutant, escaped from an Endocity to join the pirates, carried the Church's message.

The Minotaur-Prophet

The first mutant, the Minotaur-Prophet is the founder of the Neuro-emotional Church. A curiosity throughout the Empire during the period when genetic mutations were still an extremely rare phenomenon, he was one day brought to Golden Planet to be displayed. It was on this occasion that he discovered Amourine, a small white flower that grows in immaculate gold. He then ingested some seeds, and his destiny was turned upside down. Taken to an Endocity, he escaped and started upon the long road as preacher of the love flower, the white weed. The essence of his message is clear: "God is concentrated in Amarax." In other words, the divine reveals itself in the principle of a person's elevation. When a man has the sincere will to better himself, he renews himself with the heavenly dimension that is inside of him. The reference to "god" does not allude to a clearly defined entity, but rather to an idea of a superior force favorable to humans, creatures, and to life in general. Amarax is in each one of us, but it is through our acts and the intention and determination with which we accomplish them that reinforces it, or to the contrary, degrades it.

In the Endocities, the Minotaur-Propohet's message quickly found a large response in the heart of the mutant population. As their numbers increased, the word of the Neuro-emotional spread. The Church as such, then structured and organized itself. Temples were constructed in the most sordid places and the most hidden, where the word, held in contempt by the Empire, would be the most heard. Priests, called "reverends" or "sacerdotes" were trained and sent out in every direction. They brought with them some small seeds from the Saint Amourine, the flower with fantastic properties.

Saint Amourine and Amarax

On Golden Planet — where it grows wild everywhere without being cultivated — Saint Amourine is at best considered ornamental and at worst like a weed. And yet, it is also the Empire's worst enemy — a poisonous flower that could overturn the established order and turn hierarchies upside down — and the greatest hope of all beings who people the universe. It is a miraculous potion that could change the Emperoress and reform the Human Universe without shedding a drop of blood. Because Amourine, Ithis' gift of the sacred flower, which draws its life from the purity of gold or angelic hearts, has the power to create love, to find once again the feeling of love that the divine feels for life itself. The dark forces of the Necro-Dream fight against Amourine, which is like a poison to them. For Amourine heals the Merope virus (the evil that is a direct expression of the Necro-Dream) and purifies Amarax (the vital drive from which beings strengthen themselves and find their force).

The Kublarian Sect

A secret society present throughout the universe, the Kublarian sect is a heterogeneous congregation of enthusiasts united by the same hallucinatory love of the kublar… but not just any kublar. The soul of the sect, the one who inspires and directs it, is the "Minister of Finance," a mysterious individual unknown to all. Despite his hermit-like discretion, he can count on the absolute fidelity and devotion of ten million followers, all ready for the ultimate sacrifice, when finally the reign of the "Almighty Kublar" will come into being. Under the supreme Minister of Finance's authority are the Treasurers and the Cashiers, who respectively represent the sect officers and the troops. This hierarchy corresponds to a level of mystical initiation as well as a physical commitment. For in accomplishing their goal, the Kublarians often lead acts of violence, which are similar to forceful takeovers or coups. Usually, they are perfectly harmless and very well integrated into society. However, the Kublarians distinguish themselves with a finely scarified tattoo that they wear at the nape of the neck, precisely at the base of the axis of the second cervical vertebrae. This enigmatic mark looks like a shut eye.

The Miraculous Source

The origins of the Kublarian sect come from the legend that surrounds the birth of the kublar, the Imperial currency that is in current use throughout the Human Universe. One day, at the beginning of the Empire, Rosemonde 1st the Rebis who reigned at the time called for his crown — the golden flame that encircled his head — regretting that he could not turn it into gold to bail out his declining treasury. Hardly had the thought occurred to him when a fountain of gold pieces sprung from his hands, pouring forth in a crystalline cascade… ten million standard gold kublars. On the front, the sparkling coins displayed a portrait of Rosemonde, and on the back, a shut eye. Made of the finest gold, each piece was, aside from being absolutely unalterable, capable of resisting the highest temperatures, as well as the most corrosive acids. It was a great treasure that, with no uncertainty, was well worth much more than the sum total of the coins' face value. The same day, overcome by sudden madness, Rosemonde sneaked out of the Golden Palace incognito and left in a trance for the casino planet Vegas-Vegas where he squandered away his fortune in slot machines.

The Purifying Deluge

Known by initiated numismatists by the name of "original edition," the entirety of the standard gold kublars has long since been dispersed to every corner of the Human Universe. The gold shower episode has been forgotten by everyone… or almost everyone. The Kublarians, worshipers of the almighty power of the kublar, perpetuate the memory, working relentlessly to gather the ten million lost pieces. That which might seem like a strange fad, in fact responds to a profound mystical logic. The Kublarians are crusaders, and their divine mission is to enable the triumphant coming of a divine being whose body is composed of the ten million standard gold kublars. When finally they are united, then the "Almighty Kublar" will appear, opening the ten million eyes, and thus a deluge of gold will rain down, purifying the universe…

Driven by the fervor of their religious certainty, the ten million Treasurers and Cashiers upkeep a vast informants' network, who are in charge of tracing original edition coins. As soon as one is located, every possible method is used to take possession of it. Numerous violent raids and pilfering, carried out every day in the universe, can in fact be attributed to them. But the sacred importance of their mission justifies the means. To this day, five million eight hundred and seventy-two thousand, three hundred and forty-two original edition standard

The White Machines

Ophidat's nature is double, at once darkness and light. He is like a serpent in form, with black and white evenly distributed scales. He sometimes shows his dark side, and at other times his bright and luminous side. On rare occasions, he presents both aspects of his dual nature. Whether he is under the influence of Darkness — black scales, or of Light — white scales, the repercussions are then felt on a universal scale. As the Techno-Technos are completely under the Ophidat's controlling yoke, all equipment that they manufacture is tinged with the Ohpidat "spirit," its double essence, and so is intimately mixed with darkness and light. Thus while the secular guardian starts letting his scales of light appear, certain Techno-Techno machines called "White Machines" demonstrate the "will" to protect humanity against the designs of Darkness, who seek exactly the opposite.

gold kublars have been recouped. They are guarded in a secret place, the whereabouts only known by the Minister of Finance.

The Perfect Androgyne Cult and the Paleo-Wars of Religion

Although entirely disconnected from all that is mystical or religious, the most observed cult in all the Empire (even more than the Church of the Industrial Saints) remains unquestionably to be that of the Perfect Androgyne. For on all the Imperial worlds, nobody questions the sublime sacred and divine nature of the Emperoress. His-Her great longevity, the miracles that are attributed to Him-Her, as well as education and cultural tradition associate His-Her person with virtues reserved only for living gods. From the Nobles to the lowly people from the Maganat worlds, the Prez of the Endocities and their fellow citizens, everyone reveres His-Her distinguished person, even if their acts of respect are not in the least bit laden with hope. Numerous days have been declared public holidays, and official events (cultural or sporting, for example) are celebrated in honor of the Emperoress. If some at times give themselves over to Him-Her with confidence and a bit of hope, it is essentially with the hope that He-She will change and that this universe of predation and violence will finally give way to an era of peace. But they are naive, sweet dreamers.

Parallel to tributes given to the perfect incarnation of the double male and female principle, the Empire regularly organizes (every four standard years) gigantic days of galactic size: the Paleo-Wars of Religion. Broadcast to all the worlds on the hypertele and attended by the Empire's upper crust brought together in a special giant stadium of ten million seats, these huge events are the symbolic representation of the paleo-gods' dethroning. Colossal figurines, each the size of a planet, represent the divinities formally venerated on Terra Prima: Isis, Buddha, Horus, Jesus, Mohammed, King Elvis, Jehovah, and others. The figurines are brought into space and placed in an open zone. Then before the ecstatic eyes of hundreds of billions of tele-junkies, a fleet of the Empire's monolithic vessels tackle their mission of wiping them out with the mono-H bomb. This magnificently ordered ballet ends in a brilliant, crowning fireworks-like display. It leaves a lasting image of startling beauty in the minds of the amazed and stunned spectators, reinforcing the firm conviction that the Perfect Androgyne is really the greatest of all divinities, the one who knows how to triumph over all the others.

Paleo-Marx? And God in All of That…

The confederation of Colonial planets, lead by the Troglosocialik Federation, the galactic Mencheviks, and diverse minor factions (Poly-Schismatiks, Avatars Trotsko-Revoltionaries and Proto-Nihiliks) boycott all festivities linked to the Paleo-Wars of Religion and have even officially registered an Imperial amendment project on this subject. Outraged that the figure of Paleo-Marx was not included in the final group of divinities (as god of the Atheists), they are leading an active smear campaign against these "unproductive festivities that are contrary to the interest of the masses."

Religious Observance and Mysticism in the Universe

With thousands of worlds scattered in a universe more vast than human thought, worlds inhabited by populations who rarely have the occasion to leave, worlds immersed in the stellar void, crossed in every direction by esoteric forces and magic fluids, inevitably have numerous mystical currents appear and blossom. The more that the worlds are isolated and lacking in riches, which makes them susceptible to cause interest in the Empire, greater are the chances that a particular type of cult develops. In reality, the Church of the Industrial Saints does not have to worry about competition from the mystics. The Church has huge means at its disposal to condemn every form of independent human thought. But where the Church's sticky hands cannot reach, in the remote and neglected places, mystical thought can become a philosophic movement and even an active religion.

Apart from the Techno-Techno order's hierarchy, there does not exist any other type of ecclesiastic official. But that does not stop hundreds of thousands of practicing devotees to act as priests and servants of the cult, preaching its good word. Depending upon the circumstances, if some divine revelation backs up their sermon, the followers embrace the faith. For example, the Neuro-emotional Church counts millions in its "flocks" or congregations; yet cults which become too important run the risk of being declared enemies of the Empire. The Church of the Industrial Saints only tolerates those who do not bother them. If another church attracts too much attention, or is too much in the limelight, shadowing the C.I.S., it will have to answer to "a higher authority."

Fundamentally, the mystical, religious, or simply personal observance that is the least visible — and without a doubt the most dangerous for the Empire and the Magnus Dei — is Amarax awakening in one's conscious. Amarax is the great spirit that lies dormant in each one of us, and the will to always act according to the harmonious principles granted to the spiritual heart. The Techno-Technos are powerless against it, and their greatest fear must be that a majority of the Empire's citizens end up becoming aware of it. If that happened, Central Planet might see the end of its days of grandeur.

Amarax and the Necro-Dream

Amarax

Amarax is an energy. It is a vibration that is both ethereal and extremely powerful, resulting from an accord between the physical heart and the spiritual heart. The physical heart produces a clearly identifiable and perceptible beat, but next to the physical heart resides another heart, immaterial and invisible. It is the spiritual heart, also called "Path," that also makes a noticeable pulsation. Moreover, anyone with keen vision, or due to some particular circumstances, can catch a glimpse of the spiritual heart's phantom "halo."

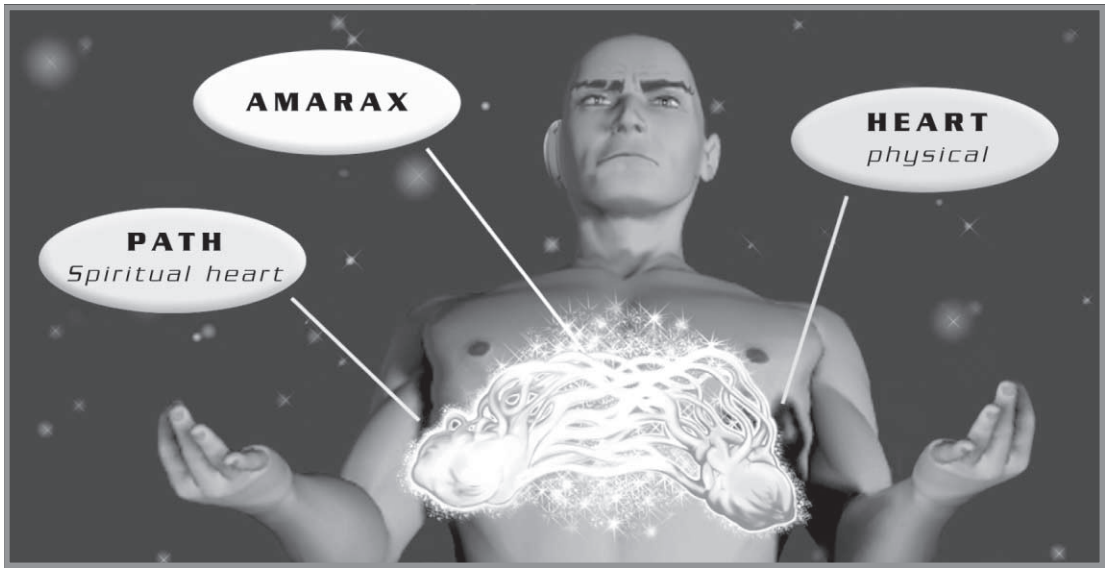
The balance between the physical and spiritual heart thus produces a vibrating wave that draws its source directly from life's first energy. Amarax is this particular type of spirit, zeal, strength, boldness, or dauntlessness that one feels when in a profound state of inner harmony.

Besides the increased dynamism felt by every human as soon as he lets his spiritual heart blossom, the harmony between the physical heart and the Path can bring much more. Like all beauty in the universe, the Path is fragile and needs special care. But those who cultivate it, who are careful to keep away from their heart the harmful sources that would attack it, see Amarax strengthen. The more this wave is energetic and powerful, the deeper the symbiosis between it and the universe.

At the first stage, Amarax brings a certain interior force. Next, as it develops, it imparts new abilities: increased comprehension, seduction capacities, and a sense of conviction that can develop into veritable hypnotic powers. Naturally, these aptitudes are the essential keys for higher levels of mastery of the surrounding universe. The possibility to act upon neighboring elements is not the ultimate goal, but to create a protective sphere around oneself that allows for control, protection, and in particular, help in avoiding attacks from the universe at large. At an ultimate degree, when the commitment is profound, permanent, and absolute, and when an encounter with an energy encourages growth, Amarax can become a factor of improvement and perfection that increases the strength and abilities of the individual tenfold, in clearly superhuman proportions. Without losing their humanity, without reaching the divine sphere, the upper-level Amarax initiates become exceptional beings, capable of all types of incredible acts. The areas in which their faculties and aptitudes grow depends upon the energy that inspires them. Amarax can for example accomplish physical exploits usually reserved for creatures and ultra-powerful engineering, acquire a staggering mastery of speed, or develop a prodigious photographic memory associated with a phenomenal visual acuity.

In brief, Amarax is a source of inner vitality, a door that, once found and opened, can lead to the mastery of certain forces and fluids, but also and above all is a shield against the destructive action of the universe. In a human being, the disappearance of Amarax amounts to its renunciation. Without it, one is nothing more than a lifeless puppet, left to the hands of cruel madmen whose dreams are haunted with images of death.

The nature of the bond between aspiration and action is the key to realizing one's destiny. Consequently, the quest for Amarax inevitably passes through the choice of a code of conduct, and respecting this code in every act and decision. Of course, everyone is free to act as he feels he should, but every act that departs from the line of conduct that one has chosen distances him from Amarax. It introduces a dissonance that disturbs the vibration between the two hearts.



Conforming to the ideal is key. This ideal is generally given by the honor code one has chosen. To betray one's code, that is to say, to act against it brings about a loss of Amarax. Of course, the code one chooses is not an absolute and irrevocable constraint. One can always change the code. But Amarax likes consistency and perseverance. And when action is in harmony with the chosen path, Amarax grows.

Honor codes

For more information on applying Honor Codes in the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* see pages 90–94 of the rule book. For tips on gamemastering Honor Codes, see pages 4–18 of the *Compaion Book to the Game Master Screen.*

Fuga

The Path: "Escape is the most accomplished expression of the art of evasion. There is less glory in confronting the enemy front on then to feint and avoid him. Infamy is only ever in the end action and in no case is it in the means employed." The Fuga consists of three great techniques, almost three schools: camouflage, encystment and escape. All have their advantages and disadvantages, but at the highest degree of mastery, all three techniques can accomplish veritable miracles.

Achievement: Observation of the Fuga code requires of those who embrace this path to avoid every form of confrontation at all cost, to bring the art of subterfuge to its highest level, to camouflage, and to sham. This demanding path should not be likened to cowardliness, because he who slips away does not deny the risk. He appropriates it and controls it. The range of choices is very large as it goes from loyal evasion to the most absolute treachery.

Reward: The respect of the Fuga code is a source of harmony. When one adheres to this path in a subtle and judicious manner, the physical and spiritual heart are in communion and Amarax grows. A new dimension of Fuga opens up then, and one accedes to techniques of combat, cunning and escape that are more and more rich and effective. For the grand initiates, they can achieve, for example, invisibility, not by transformation undergone by the body structure, but by mastery of suggestion, vibratory emanations and cataleptic hypnosis.

Positive Actions

+ Act with discretion. Be efficient without being seen.

+ Know how to wait, in the shadows, for the opportune moment for action.

+ Avoid danger at the right moment, rather than confronting it and exposing oneself to risk. Return once the danger has gone.

Negative Actions

- Act out in the open. Expose oneself.

- Intervene hastily, forgetting all precaution.

- Accept confrontation out of bravado, pride or the simple desire to show one's bravery.

Bushitaka

The Path: "Inspired from the Castaka clan's warrior code, the Bushitaka requires of those who choose this path to behave like a warrior in combat and in all of life's circumstances. And, for a warrior, the highest virtue, the objective that he must aim for in all circumstances is victory."

Achievement: The obligation to be victorious, to defeat one's enemies, demands a warrior's bravery and courage, of course, but also and above all, great clairvoyance in the use of his qualities. "Courage is of no service to a warrior if he exposes it and dies without having triumphed." The warrior must never cease adapting himself, to be like water that runs and bypasses obstacles. He must know how to penetrate into the enemy's mind and intentions, evaluate their forces, never overestimate his own, and be humble in battle, as well as in victory. Here again, there are innumerable nuances, since one can, by selection, opt for brute force or bank on strategy and technique.

Reward: Respecting the requirements of Bushitaka conduct leads the warrior to a greater and greater mastery of the science of combat, followed by new dimensions in the art of confrontation. This could be instantaneous understanding of tactical demands for a given situation, or better, the ability to confront several adversaries, armed or unarmed, with the tranquil certainty that each blow will inflict mortal injury, or at least incapacitating wounds. The accomplished warrior, whose Amarax is grand, achieves a form of serenity where adversity is no longer an obstacle on destiny's road.

Positive Actions

+ Conquer fear. Enforce a permanent discipline upon oneself in order to always have it under control.

+ Defeat the adversary. Deploy all one's efforts, go to the limit of one's forces, and still find the resources to make him fold. Faced with an adversary that is too strong, one must wait for the moment to strike and seize him.

+ Beat obstacles. Trials are nothing; one can overcome them or ,when needed, circumvent them.

The Hero's Crucible

Whether in the midst of an Endocity, the Necro-Dream's domain of predilection instilled by the Techno-Technos, or in any of the other numerous places where human life is to be found, there exists a notion of values that motivates certain individuals to excel, living in harmony with their convictions, getting closer and closer every day to an ideal of perfection. This philosophy is called the honor code, for it calls upon the most noble of feelings and constitutes, in the eyes of its followers a veritable moral obligation. There are several different honor codes, for example the Fuga, which advocates a certain form of cowardly behavior and the virtues of flight, or Veritas, which encourages the search for truth and the exposure of secrets; but all the codes seem to lead their followers towards a spiritual illumination and total fulfillment.

Negative Actions

- Be overcome with fear and become dominated by it.
- Resign oneself to defeat. Accept resignation and lose one's soul in doing so.
- Indefinitely waste one's efforts in a vain combat.

Paleo-nobilis

The Path: "Resurgence of the paleo-knights' ancient code, the Paleo-Nobilis is a thankless and constraining path that requires of those who chose it to respect the rules and principles of loyalty, humility and sacrifice." Of course, the demands and prerogatives that are tied to this Honor Code can give way to many interpretations, and if some see there the intention to revive a haughty grandeur that privileges a subject's protection in exchange for his submission, others see it as the more "paladin" approach of the valiant life. The Paleo-Nobilis code can serve as a guiding principle for individuals in all sectors of human activity, from the art of war to intellectual research in passing by disclosure and diffusion of information.

Achievement: The observation of Paleo-Nobilis principles can present some variations, but generally they are associated with the concepts of integrity and honesty, necessitating adherence to a rule of conduct (chastity, scholarship, defense of the widow and the orphan, etc.) and the pursuit of a quest (deliverance from oppression, search for truth, etc.).

Reward: Of course, the simple fact of abiding by the principles one is given fills the Paleo-Nobilis follower with satisfaction, but in overcoming these compulsory trials, he also sees his convictions strengthened. His Amarax grows, and with it the confidence he feels in the soundness of his battles and faith in his acts. With this faith, he can part the seas…

Positive Actions

+ Protect the weak, at the risk of one's life if necessary.
+ Spurn material possessions and honors.
+ Never lose sight of one's quest. It comes first, but never in spite of chosen rules and values.

Negative Actions

- Tolerate highly unjust points of view.
- Be seduced by fame or glory, or be corrupted by the lures of gain and reward.
- Forget what gives meaning to life. Allow a bending or stretching of the precepts by which one is governed.

Veritas

The Path: "The world has the right to know." That is the slogan of the Veritas Honor Code. Those who adopt it have thus an obligation to tell the facts as they are, to reveal, and to let the whole of the reality be known.

Achievement: A demanding path, the Veritas Honor Code requires its followers to pursue the truth, not for its appropriation, but on the contrary to let the truth be defused and let it be known. In reality, the follower does not naively impose the code upon himself by revealing everywhere and in any circumstance what he is thinking. He can lie, conceal, and even betray, if it is necessary to protect what is being hidden. Because the objective, the purpose of this commitment, is to unearth that which is being conjured and hidden, to show the secret, dark side of things. The only thing that counts is bringing false truths out into the light of day, the denunciation of hypocrisy. Taken as a dominant guiding principle, the Veritas Honor Code can be crossed with another complimentary code.

Reward: Through the disclosure and broadcasting of the truth, Veritas followers fulfill their destiny, find an inner harmony and acquire capacities that are always greater in the areas of study, research, investigation or analysis, but also according to their complimentary code can evolve in the arts of escape, battle, and develop a symbiosis with nature. At an elevated level, the Veritas followers predicative abilities can become veritably miraculous.

Positive Actions

+ Tell and search for the truth, that which another contrives to conceal.
+ Protect the truth, no matter who bears it or has it in his possession.
+ Spread the truth. Make it be known by the greatest possible number.

Negative Actions

- Be satisfied with the superficial and believe in the certainty of facts.
- Allow a truth to be kept under wraps or disappear, taken away by the one who has it in his possession.
- Contribute in one way or another in keeping a truth concealed.

Skatawah

The Path: "Nature's harmony is a perfection that must be rediscovered," a paleo-prophet once said. The Skatawah followers search, in everything, for the secret rhythm of life and strive in all of their acts to be in harmony with nature.

The Path of Enlightenment

Honor Codes are not strict rules that must be followed blindly. On the contrary, one might combine several different elements from two codes. In that case, one code is still dominant. For example, warriors following the path of the Bushitaka might take on some traits found in the Fuga code, in various degrees that they determine freely. In that case they are adding the art of discretion and efficiency to the path of glory, perhaps becoming warriors of the night that are never seen, great warriors, though their faces are never revealed. Even within this original code mix, a female warrior might add less of the Fuga than her sister.

A code is truly a personal affair, coming from within, and not a set of strict rules. Every individual defines his own code of honor, elaborated around a dominant axis, and traces his own path.

Achievement: He who commits to the Skatawah way cultivates a deep respect for all forms of life. He understands the fundamental nature of beings and elements, and assimilates himself smoothly into each bio-ecosystem that he crosses. It is not an absolute taboo to kill or put an end to life. Death is a part of life, and nature itself through the hunt and kill shows that death can have a utility. On the other hand, followers of Skatawah cannot kill blindly — end five lives when one life would have sufficed — and not without an imperative reason that justifies the act. Once death has been given, in return it thanks life: it nourishes the animal with its flesh or returns the ill-intentioned enemy to an eternal rest. In a universe where human greed puts all forms of life everywhere in danger, the Skatawah has a hard time finding its place; the overexploitation of resources and weapons of mass destruction are painful thorns in his side. But life goes on, and the comprehension of its workings are a source of harmony.

Reward: Due to the harmony that it brings to the heart of its followers, as well as in their relations with all forms of life, great and small, the thankless road of the Skatawah favors the blossoming of Amarax. With time they acquire fabulous powers, intimately linked to the structure of nature: the ability to immerse oneself into a habitat's biomass; to move with great speed within surroundings; detect, perceive, and understand all forms of life; and even appropriate and reproduce the aptitudes of various forms of life, animals of higher and lower orders. Great Skatawah initiates, who moreover perceive and decipher residual vibrations from dead plants and animals, can in this way acquire the paleo-tiger's force, paleo-snake's quickness, and mimic Terra Prima's paleo-phasmids.

Positive Actions

+ Know the surrounding environment by understanding how it works.

+ Love and respect all aspects of an environment, and learn to immerse oneself in a habitat without disturbing or disrupting it.

+ Protect every form of life.

Negative Actions

- Look down upon, despise, or refuse to acknowledge a habitat's natural life order.

- Contribute in one way or another to upsetting the rhythm or balance of a habitat and its surroundings.

- Menace a species' bio-diversity or equilibrium by, for example, annihilating its representatives.

Rayah

The Path: "Unity is the invisible bond that links the scattered elements of a group to one another. It is from this bond that the diverse elements draw their force." The Rayahs find a sense of personal fulfilment in their commitment to the group to which they belong, and grow stronger as the group itself strengthens.

Achievement: Rayah is the path that cannot be taken alone. In fact, this commitment supposes that one belongs to a group. It can be any group, for the nature and size are of no importance, from the moment that it represents an invaluable and unique place to the follower, who would not leave the group for anything in the world. Rayah disciples have carried their commitment to the highest possible level when they have been able to forge invisible bonds of complicity with the other members of the group. The group they belong to is a free-will choice, which they agree to defend with their life if necessary, and which they are able to protect or aide through their knowledge and competence. The preeminence of the group over the individual must not however be made to the detriment of the individual's personality, since on the contrary, the group nourishes and enriches itself from its diversity and originality. Discipline is surely not the objective, but rather experiencing an extraordinary complementarity founded on optimizing the use of all of the members' capacities, even the most whimsical. One does not have a sense of subjugation to the group, but rather reaps the benefits from the fruit of free consent, accompanied by a profound will to protect the group.

Reward: In respecting the Rayah code, the group becomes a supra-entity whose force would be equal to the sum of all the forces of which it is composed. The group becomes a body for which each member is a tremendous tool, gifted with autonomy, intelligence, and creativity. The collective action of all the members transcends their individual capacities. At an elevated stage, communion between the members is such that they can improvise acts, without consulting one another, and nevertheless show a greater efficiency than talented artists performing a well-rehearsed piece.

Positive Actions

+ Be open to other members of the group and receptive to their needs.

+ Accept the constraints of group life and abide by the requirements imposed for the group's survival.

+ Protect the group and bear hardships and privations as needed, up to and including the supreme sacrifice.

Negative Actions

- Refuse to fit in and ignore the collective needs of the group.

- Prefer one's own security to the detriment of the group, and protect one's independence and solitude.

- Abandon the group. Betray it.

Amorh

The Path: Mystical concept that has been absent for a very long time in this universe, Amorh is only attainable by a few remaining initiates who still understand its meaning. The Neuro-Emotional priests are without a doubt the last upholders of this code that has sunk into oblivion. Love, peace, and compassion are Amorh 's key words, a triptych that goes beyond sermon and that is demanded of the follower at each and every moment.

Achievement: In a universe where even the concept of peace is an aberration, disciples of Amorh must, before anything else, rediscover the original meaning of these words. After a long initiatory journey, they must then

cultivate a compassionate spirit and put into practice an active pacifism. Even under the worst torture (Technos for example), an Amorh disciple must consider his torturer as a victim.

Reward: By observing the precepts of the Amorh code, the disciple sees his Amarax grow very quickly and develops his capacities of resistance and conviction. At a certain stage, he is even able to diffuse the violence around him with a simple look and restore peace in the hearts of those who have submitted themselves to the whims of hatred.

Positive Actions

+ Work for non violence and peace.

+ Favor peace between different forms of life.

+ Protect the weak, encourage one and all to fight against the negations of life, and love even your torturer if it must be so.

Negative Actions

– Get carried away; give in to anger and create discord.

– Contribute to the propagation of hatred, and set different races against each other.

– Create despair by an offhanded, casual attitude, and condemn the hopeless through negligence.

Where and How the Necro-Dream Operates

Endocity
Synthetic drugs.
Homeosluts.
Hypertele.
Denunciation.
Suicidal tendencies.
Major impact.

Golden Planet
Frequent the Imperial Court.
Major impact.

Colonial Planets
Frequent ruling circles.
Moderate to major impact.

Universe as a Whole
Oppressive legislation.
Hypertele.
Caste system.
Moderate to major impact.

The Necro-Dream

A gigantic Techno-Techno plot to enslave humanity, the Necro-Dream also refers to the dazed and contented stupor in which it plunges all those who are subjected to its effects.

Sworn and implacable enemies of all life forms, the Techno-Technos are not just satisfied with the destruction of the universe's bio-elements — devastation of planets, conquests, systematic elimination of animal and plant species which besides, nobody worries about. So they conduct another form of assault that is even more systematic and insidious. For if their power is great, it is still not absolute, and they must continue to associate with the other powers of the universe — the Empire, Maganats and Colonial planets. As they cannot implement a radical and definitive action within everyone's sight and knowledge, the Techno-Technos apply a simple and efficient strategy: "The river is vast and powerful. We cannot control or dry up its flux. But we can poison its source, and its polluted waters will spread venom everywhere."

Thus, on a cosmic scale, they carry out a plan that aims to enslave the living forces of the universe. They demean human aspirations, diminish the spirit of adventure, and stifle at the embryonic stage the smallest demonstration of free will. Every person who has fallen under the influence of the Necro-Dream is nothing more than a lifeless creature, a ship without a sail. The most well-known and visible example of their action is the hypertele, which gives false information, manipulates, and keeps each and everyone in a dumbstruck state of stupefaction. But they use a number of other weapons: drugs (SPV and Cocaloco Dark) manipulation and oppression. All of their actions aim at one target: soil and destroy ideals, as well as hope and love.

To be objective, one must recognize the fact that their underhanded and fiendish schemes are only the exaggerated expression of the immense theatre that all groups of significance in the universe — that is to say, Maganats, Colonial planets, and even the Empire — perpetually work toward: an established position that assures them power and domination. But the Techno-Technos are the only ones to follow a skilfully elaborated plan: the Necro-Dream. For them, it is not enough to take advantage of weaknesses. They must nourish them, maintain them, flatter them, and let humanity get carried down the road to ruin. However, the Techno-Technos themselves are nothing but cogs in the wheel of an immeasurable dark force that surpasses and uses them. In fact, the roots of their colossal power are plunged directly into the Tenebrea's heart. They have fantastic powers, but in return, they must work against life and contribute to making the universe, one day, a cold and empty space where infinite night will reign forever.

The Necro-Dream stretches its tentacles everywhere the Empire asserts its authority. Of course, it is massively spread throughout all levels of the Endocities, but no planet is truly spared. Not even the Golden Planet, where greed, rapacity, and ambition mix together to make a most favorable compost for implanting the Necro-Dream.

As soon as one enters into its sphere of activity, the moment that one falls into its web, all the most fundamental principles upon which one's deepest convictions rest start to waiver. The slow chipping away, undermining of the spirit has begun. The strongest of resolutions blow away like dust in the wind. If exposure lingers on, and if one does not fight at each and every moment against its insidious and persistent action, free will dwindles and disappears. And one may end up hazy-eyed, forever riveted before an empty screen. Life will be gone, and one will be nothing more than a creature of the Tenebrae.

Technological Progress

"Omnipresent" is the only way to describe the prominence of technology in the modern Empire. It is seen everywhere, having infiltrated even the most remote regions of space. In the Endocities, where every being and object is submitted to its tyrannical yoke, it even seems to be the creative force that all things spring from. Everywhere humanity extends their eager reach, technology travels with them, then propagates itself. Today, even the least fertile planets devoid of natural resources boast technological levels that make pre-Empiric times on Terra Prima seem like the Stone Ages. Indeed, technology is the hallmark and signature of the Human Empire.

The Roots of Modern Technology

Without technology, the Empire would not truly be able to maintain its hold over the worlds it conquers and engulfs. All planets, from the most primitive to those already endowed with their own form of technology, are forced to conform to the technological standards of the benevolent Empire… or incur its righteous wrath.

Clearly, technology plays a significant role in the life of the Human Empire. Naturally, humans constantly seek the greater convenience that mechanization provides, but the link is deeper and more profound. The reverence paid to holy technology is almost a form of worship. It must not be forgotten that the Church of the Industrial Saints is the official religion of the Empire, and technology is its prophet. An overabundance of technological products suits its interests, and their use is considered an act of devotion and allegiance.

So the Techno-Techno order brought technology to the Empire, and the Empire was grateful. But relations between the two groups have often been strained. In fact, for the 107 years between 23124 and 23231, they were downright hostile. Those years constituted the Techno-Techno interregnum. The Imperial government went into exile, and the Church of the Industrial Saints thought itself powerful enough to take the reins of the Empire's destiny into its hands. Never before or since had technology been so mighty. Then again, never before had it shown its true face to such a degree. During that era of absolute power of the Techno-Technos, the conspiracy of the Tenebrae stretched its dark shadow over all domains. The contempt it exhibited toward all forms of biological life manifested itself in an avalanche of technological systems and devices designed to subjugate humans instead of liberate them. They had already reached the point that no human soul could understand all their workings, and still more technological marvels were arriving every day. The coming of the Tenebrae was at hand, and the Magnus Dei opened the gates for it.

The reign of technology ended when the Imperial Siamese twins Artaran and Marlana returned. Of course, it remained a valuable asset to the Empire, and none of the Great Pillars would have been foolhardy enough to suppress it, but the dizzying heights it had attained gradually receded. The Techno-Techno order underwent a period of disgrace lasting approximately 200 years — a mere pittance considering they brought the entire soul of the Universe to the brink of damnation — the Empire's citizens somewhat slackened their frantic quest for technology, as if they had learned their lesson. During a short period of a few dozen years, it even became fashionable to publicly denounce technology and its excesses. Not only did the Techno-Techno order conspire against humanity in the name of the Tenebrae, but they also produced such a large quantity of weapons and machinery that no single one of them was truly effective. Their measures and counter-measures canceled each other out.

At that point, it became clear to both the Techno-Technos and the Empire that a high level of technology did not necessarily provide greater efficiency. The C.I.S. realized that a technology that was too-highly sophisticated might even sound the death-knell for its aspirations; if it became too specific, it would grow outdated and hence lose the interest of its faithful followers. On the other hand, the Empire saw that any technology that became too complex would no longer be under its control. Little by little, as the twenty-fourth millennium rolled in, their attitudes toward technology reached an equilibrium, which has lasted until today. The Church of the Industrial Saints does not divulge all its marvels, but neither does it take advantage of its prominent position. In exchange, the Empire uses some of the C.I.S.'s technology, shares a number of its secrets, and allows the order to occupy an influential presence at all levels of society, without damning it to disrepute. At the present time, all institutions of power utilize some level of technology, and the C.I.S. considers this a more subtle approach to infiltrating the entire universe. On the other hand, the average technological level no longer extends to the height of atrocities experienced by the poor citizens who lived during the 107 years of Techno-Techno rule.

Commercial Break

More perforating, more explosive, the new protonic cavity heads are finally available on the black market! This month's special offer: buy ten charges and get a free micro-camera gift with purchase!! Try them on your wife: the best explosions will be broadcast Empire-wide.

Development and Innovations

Clearly, the Church of the Industrial Saints is still the most active participant in the field of research and development of new applications. Within their gigantic factory-labs, the Techno-Technos continue their patient work of unlocking the technological secrets imparted by the Ophidiat, their custodian. They never maintain a significant lead over

Cogano II

Cogana II is a small planet in the Whakk system, owned by the family of the Poly-Romanoffs. Under its leaden sky stretch the sinister shapes of the giga-factories and their ventilation pipes, shrouded in ash-gray smoke. Night and day, security craft cut through the sky in slow and ponderous flight. On the ground, Endoguard patrols accompanied by their beasts — vicious native varans with drooling jaws — maintain a vigilant guard. In the unlikely occurrence that any living thing penetrates the positronic shields, they have orders to kill on sight. For this is where the multi-cogan is made, weapon of the elite troops of the Empire.

other researchers in the galaxy, except when a new phenomenon is revealed to them, setting off an ever-expanding circle of technical knowledge. The C.I.S. pioneers all fields of technology and invents devices for all types of work. However, these ambitious and varied projects do not lead them to neglect the more essential fields of weapons and transport, which present a greater opportunity. However, they are not the only competitors in this arena — all four Great Pillars of the Empire contribute to military technology in one way or another. But the Ophidiat gives the Techno-Technos a significant edge, which allows them to make the greatest contributions to the Empire. For example, it was the Ophidiat who gave them the means to install Techno-Tunnels all over the universe. These passageways through the fabric of space instantly join together points that would otherwise remain forever separated. More than 18,000 Techno-Tunnels are currently in use. But it was not for the sake of altruism that the C.I.S. put this technology to the Empire's service. Without them, the universe would be nothing but a conflicting jumble, over which nothing could rule — not even the Tenebrae. What's more, as long as they hold complete control over the tunnels, the Techno-Technos possess a tremendous weapon and a significant means of pressure over the Empire.

Because of this advantage, the Techno-Technos do not have to strain their talents in order to remain the undisputed masters of technology. But there are many specialized fields in which it would be a grave mistake to disregard the contributions of other players.

For example, the Ekonomat, that discreet and supposedly nonpartial organization, also maintains an army of researchers, mostly based on Neo-Knox. They may not have access to a source of revelation of technological prowess that the Techno-Technos do, and nothing comes freely to them. However, they have access to a source of incredible power through Bemb, the custodian of the Per-Beod gate. They may not understand all the principles behind it, but the small fraction they do know how to use gives them an impressive arsenal, to say the least. For instance, they have tremendous defense batteries of hyperdesiccating rays. These artillery units, distributed in a ring around Neo-Knox, can shoot a vibrating cone that instantly converts any water molecule within it to hydrogen and oxygen atoms. The weapons are only considered to have a limited range — in outer space, a few hundred kilometers in wide beam and a few thousand kilometers in narrow beam; in atmosphere, only a hundred meters wide at the maximum — but those estimates are purely theoretical because the weapons have never been used. This paradox arises from Bemb's concerns. He acknowledges the need to protect himself, but he dislikes the idea of mindlessly disrupting life in the universe. However, the few other vessels of the Ekonomat that are also equipped with these weapons give every indication that they wouldn't hesitate in the slightest to use them if the need arose.

The Hyperindustrial Era

At the same time, thanks to its almost inexhaustible financial resources, the Ekonomat simply acquires any means of technology as the need arises. Both its mercenary and regular troops are constantly supplied with the best in vehicles, vessels, weapons, instruments of detection and other various equipment. Since they maintain a massive presence in all corners of the universe, this also helps contribute to the spread of technology.

Among the other Great Pillars of the Empire, many Maganats have become specialized in industry and heavy production. On their hyperindustrial planets and systems, the weapons and equipment of the Endoguard are produced. They do not invent the technology, of course, but they develop the manufacturing process, as well as install and maintain the machinery. Hence, they end up acquiring substantial knowledge concerning all these devices of death.

But the Maganats do not limit themselves to mere production; they are also consumers. Thanks to their countless fortunes, they buy everything that gener-

Gangez and the Supra-technology

Of all of the guardians in the Universe, Gangez is the only one who is completely melded into another individual. Since then, the Metabaron contains Gangez, but the metawarrior's personality is so powerful that the guardian within him has to take a back seat. The Metabaron therefore has extraordinary capacities and secrets at his disposal, without any influence over his true nature. It is for this reason that he can draw at will from these powers to create, for example, the Metabaronic weapons.

Bemb similarly transmitted his secrets to a recipient who equally received a form of wisdom and elevated consciousness, but whose spirit acts in accordance with Bemb's wisdom.

alized or specialized technology can offer, and in endless quantities. Their palaces flow with gold and technological devices, and they surround themselves with useless trinkets and marvels. Thanks to the frenetic and compulsive lifestyle of the great families, the holy technology is further spread.

The Colonial planets have fewer resources and do not contribute nearly as much to the expansion of technology. Nevertheless, they make up for their lack of resources by bringing all their energy to the task. Their technology is far from sophisticated, but they produce it in massive amounts. Their history overflows with examples of a single device produced in hundreds of millions of units. For example, to ensure the defense of their "revolutionary" gains, they have manufactured flabbergasting quantities of their Poly-AKA 4 assault rifle. This weapon has some weak points — it is extremely basic, like a farmer's weapon. But its lack of sophistication also offers an advantage: it is reliable in all environments, and if it does fail, a few teflo-plastic fibers will suffice to repair it. Most of the outlying worlds are completely saturated with it, as it is the symbol of the struggle of all the Empire's rebels, who praise it effusively.

While the Great Pillars carry out "official" activities of research and production, there are also the pirates living on the underseam of society who contribute in their own way to the advance of science and technology. Their means are unlimited, and they also use the services of the "defused" Mentreks who take protection in their ranks. Without the slightest help from any spiritual source, they use their ingenuity to develop machines and devices that can fight off the technology developed by the Techno-Technos, and thus fight off the Necro-Dream. For example, their bionic prostheses are absolutely reliable, unfettered by the all-powerful influence of the Church of the Industrial Saints, and any mechanical device they make runs no risk of being taken over by the Techno-Technos.

Finally, all the ordinary populations consume and use vast quantities of machines and other various gadgets. None of them may understand how all these marvels really function, but they have accepted them into their lifestyle nonetheless. Not a day goes by without some device making up for human weaknesses and flaws. Complacent in their natural laziness, humankind eagerly embraces anything that helps keep them from hard work or any kind of difficult task.

The Techno – Tunnels' Infallibility

Some would be tempted to attribute the C.I.S.'s assertions that their Interstellar Tunnels are absolutely safe, to pure and simple boasting, pointing out that a regular transport vehicle had recently disappeared in one of those Tunnels, entering without ever having been seen again. The truth of this assertion has been confirmed by the transport company's mentrek accountant. This said, the explanation is quite simple. The Techno-Tunnels have integrated into their system an extremely precise regulation mechanism that limits the number of vessels simultaneously present in the same section of the tunnel. If, for one reason or another, this maximum number is reached , the internal system automatically eliminates the surplus, in the inverse order of accreditation. This explains the disappearing vessel, and finally, isn't it reassuring to know….?

New Technology

The authorities are hostile to any new technology, even while they take advantage of it. They try to steal or buy it for their own and to suppress it elsewhere. There is a whole game just in data piracy and data legging.

Intersidereal Voyage

Intersidereal travel is exclusively practiced through hyperpropulsion and the use of Techno-Tunnels, also known as Interstellar Tunnels. Any traveler leaving one planet for another must access the closest Tunnel. First the traveler makes a "jump" into hyperspace to reach the Tunnel. The length of the jump varies and is calculated in hours (h) or days (d) of voyage. Once he uses a Tunnel, it will instantaneously "teletransport" him to any other Tunnel in the universe. The traveler then has to make a last "jump" into hyperspace to reach his final destination.

Example: If you leave Planet Baggdathi, it will take 3 hours (3h) to reach the closest Tunnel with a "jump." Once in the Tunnel, you can reach any other Interstellar Tunnel (t).

Tunnels and Spaceportals

Interstellar Tunnels

Interstellar Tunnels link all portals across the same system, or from one system to another. You can enter a departure portal and exit from any portal in the same system or any other system in the same galaxy. To enter the portal of an Interstellar Tunnel, you must show proof of having a special entry authorization pass from the Techno-Technos, which costs 200 kublars.

Intergalactic Tunnels

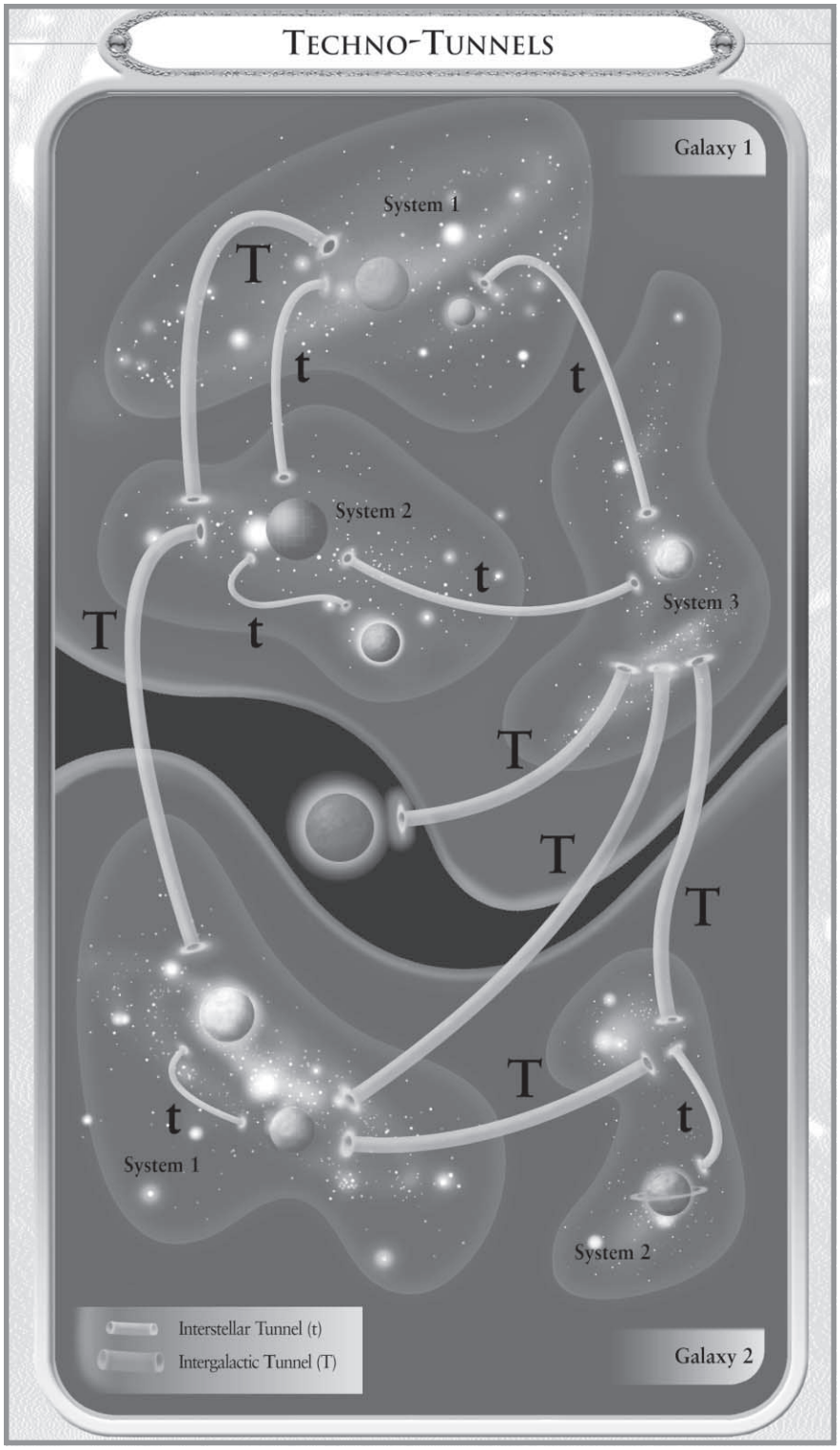
Intergalactic Tunnels work in exactly the same manner as the Interstellar Tunnels, except that they allow voyage form one galaxy to the next (marked by a T on the map). A travel accreditation costs 500 kublars.

Note: an Interstellar Tunnel (t) can only take you to another Interstellar Tunnel, while an Intergalactic Tunnel (T) can take you to any Tunnel in the universe. This is the reason why it is at times necessary to take an Interstellar Tunnel to reach a "galactic crossroads" where all sorts of equipment and services for remote expeditions are available on orbital stations, as well as an entrance to an Intergalactic Tunnel.

Types of Worlds

The Major Worlds

Every planet and group of planets located no more than five hours maximum



by hyperspace jump from a Tunnel portal.

Example: Golden Planet

The Minor Worlds

Every planet and group of planets located no more than five days maximum by hyperspace jump from a Tunnel portal.

Example: Planet Del Rey III.

Distant Worlds

Every planet and group of planets located more than five days by hyperspace jump from a Tunnel portal.

Example: Planet Marmola

Exofringe Worlds

Every planet and group of planets located at the exterior of the Fringe — frontier of the Empire.

Example: Planet TER 21, Sector 669 of the Exofringe.

Worlds of the Borders

All planets and group of planets located at the confines of the Universe.

Example: Planet Aquaend.

Travel between Planets

All planets are indexed in terms of distance, in hours and days of voyage to a neighboring Tunnel. For example, the planet Demos is listed as "4dt." This signifies:

- that it takes four days of hyperspatial travel to reach the closest Interstellar Tunnel (t)
- that Demos is a minor world, for it is less than five days from a Tunnel entrance.

If you want to go from Demos to Baggdathi, it will take you 4 days and 3 hours, and cost 200 kublars to use the Interstellar Tunnel. In this chapter, you will find a list of the most well known planets. Using this same localization principle, you can situate any known star, or even those that are to be discovered.

Planet Alix III: 14dt — exo-fringe world, independent.

Planet Aquaend: 27dt — universe-border world, prison.

Planet Badmech: 4,30ht — major world, Maganat (Kama-Ming).

Planet Barnab: 11dt — distant world, semi-independent.

Planet Del Rey III: 17dt — exo-fringe world, Colonial.

Planet Dreer: 2ht — major world, Industrial Maganat.

Planet Gargan IV: 4dt — minor world, hallucinogenic mushrooms.

Planet Garligue: 37dt — universe-border world, elephantodontes.

Planet Geidig: 7dt — distant world, sirens.

War Star: Unknown.

Planet Laylin: 3hT — major world, Maganat.

Planet Summit: 9dt — distant world, Colonial.

Travel Chart of Select Worlds

	Arh&Rah	Baggdathi	Sec-Hum	Filodendra	GPM*	Golden Planet	Gzagn	Hospital Planet	Marmola	Nibal	Okhar	Perdita	Central Planet	Puzzeline	Stellar Ice Floe	Terra Prima
Arh & Rah	X	4dT,3h	4dT,4d	4dT,2d	4dT,21d	4dT,1h	4dT,7d	4dT,2h	4dT,15d	4dT,2d	4dT,3d	4dT,24d	4dT,1h	4dT,9d	4dT,16d	4dT,5h
Baggdathi	3ht,T,4d	X	3ht,4d	3ht,2d	3ht,T,21d	3ht,1h	3ht,T,7d	3ht,2h	3ht,15d	3ht,2d	3ht,3d	3ht,24d	3ht,T,1h	3ht,T,9d	3ht,16d	3ht,5h
Sec-Hum	4dt,T,4d	4dt,3h	X	4dt,2d	4dt,T,21d	4dt,1h	4dt,T,7d	4dt,2h	4dt,15d	4dt,2d	4dt,3d	4dt,24d	4dt,T,1h	4dt,T,9d	4dt,16d	4dt,5h
Filodendra	2dt,T,4d	2dt,3h	2dt,4d	X	2dt,T,21d	2dt,1h	2dt,T,7d	2dt,2h	2dt,15d	2dt,2d	2dt,3d	2dt,24d	2dt,T,1h	2dt,T,9d	2dt,16d	2dt,5h
GPM*	21dt,T,4d	21dt,T,3h	21dt,T,4d	21dt,T,2d	X	21dt,T,1h	21dt,T,7d	21dt,T,2h	21dt,T,15d	21dt,T,2d	21dt,T,3d	21dt,T,24d	21dt,T,1h	21dt,T,9d	21dt,T,16d	21dt,T,5h
Golden Planet	1hT,4d	1ht,3h	1ht,4d	1ht,2d	1hT,21d	X	1hT,7d	1ht,2h	1ht,15d	1ht,2d	1ht,3d	1ht,24d	1hT,1h	1hT,9d	1ht,16d	1ht,5h
Gzagn	7dt,T,4d	7dt,T,3h	7dt,T,4d	7dt,T,2d	7dt,T,21d	7dt,T,1h	X	7dt,T,2h	7dt,T,15d	7dt,T,2d	7dt,T,3d	7dt,T,24d	7dt,T,1h	7dt,T,9d	7dt,T,16d	7dt,T,5h
Hospital Planet	2ht,T,4d	2ht,3h	2ht,4d	2ht,2d	2ht,T,21d	2ht,1h	2ht,T,7d	X	2ht,15d	2ht,2d	2ht,3d	2ht,24d	2ht,T,1h	2ht,T,9d	2ht,16d	2ht,5h
Marmola	15dt,T,4d	15dt,3h	15dt,4d	15dt,2d	15dt,T,21d	15dt,1h	15dt,T,7d	15dt,2h	X	15dt,2d	15dt,3d	15dt,24d	15dt,T,1h	15dt,T,9d	15dt,16d	15dt,5h
Nibal	2dt,T,4d	2dt,3h	2dt,4d	2dt,2d	2dt,T,21d	2dt,1h	2dt,T,7d	2dt,2h	2dt,15d	X	2dt,3d	2dt,24d	2dt,T,1h	2dt,T,9d	2dt,16d	2dt,5h
Okhar	3dt,T,4d	3dt,3h	3dt,4d	3dt,2d	3dt,T,21d	3dt,1h	3dt,T,7d	3dt,2h	3dt,15d	3dt,2d	X	3dt,24d	3dt,T,1h	3dt,T,9d	3dt,16d	3dt,5h
Perdita	24dt,T,4d	24dt,3h	24dt,4d	24dt,2d	24dt,T,21d	24dt,1h	24dt,T,7d	24dt,2h	24dt,15d	24dt,2d	24dt,3d	X	24dT,1h	2ht,4d	24dt,3h	24dt,5h
Central Planet	1hT,4d	1hT,3h	1hT,4d	1hT,2d	1hT,21d	1hT,1h	1hT,7d	1hT,2h	1hT,15d	1hT,2d	1hT,3d	1hT,24d	X	24dt,T,9d	1hT,16d	1hT,5h
Puzzeline	9dt,T,4d	9dt,T,3h	9dt,T,4d	9dt,T,2d	9dt,T,21d	9dt,T,1h	9dt,T,7d	9dt,T,2h	9dt,T,15d	9dt,T,2d	9dt,T,3d	9dt,T,24d	9dt,T,1h	X	9dt,T,16d	9dt,T,5h
Stellar Ice Floe	16dt,T,4d	16dt,3h	16dt,4d	16dt,2d	16dt,T,21d	16dt,1h	16dt,T,7d	16dt,2h	16dt,15d	16dt,2d	16dt3d	16dt,24d	16dt,T,1h	16dt,T,9d	X	16dt,5h
Terra Prima	5ht,T,4d	5ht,3h	5ht,4d	5ht,2d	5ht,T,21d	5ht,1h	5ht,T,7d	5ht,2h	5ht,15d	5ht,2d	5ht,3d	5ht,24d	5ht,T,1h	5ht,T,9d	5ht,16d	X

*Galactic Platform Masses

Weapons

If there is one field in which even the laziest and most unmotivated humans will take an interest, it is of course the field of warfare. The whole universe shares a genuine passion for devices of death and power, not only because they feed the murderous instinct that is always alive and well in humans, but also because they serve the coming of the Necro Dream. Directly or indirectly, the Church of the Industrial Saints is by far the largest arms dealer in the universe. The sale of arms helps build their capital. At the same time, by acclimating people to a culture of death, the arms contribute to the Tenebrae and its struggle against life. But the universe never shies from a paradox, and these same weapons that help spread death and destruction are also a crucial key to freedom, independence, and rebellion.

Whether it be poaching suicides for sport, hunting insurgents on a Maganat paradise planet, defending oneself in a hostile environment in outer space or a newly colonized planet, keeping order inside an Endocity or on some far-off planet, creating chaos and confusion in those same locations, or repelling strange creatures, a pirate band, or a squad of galacto-barbarians at the outer edges of the universe, the demand for heavy artillery is never lacking. And the range of choice is vast indeed…

Heavy Artillery

Because they offer the greatest power to portability ratio, guns of this type are the most prized across the whole Empire by amateurs and professionals alike. Thanks to new synthetic materials developed by the Church of the Industrial Saints — in particular the range of teflo-metal plastics — these weapons have seen their weight drastically reduced while still maintaining a deadly lethality. Considering that just one of them is enough to eradicate an unprotected crowd in an instant, it is amazing that they hardly weigh anything at all. Aside from these extraordinary advances, they have also undergone all kinds of different improvements. First of all, impact force has been considerably increased. Intelligent ammunition was introduced to classic projectile weapons at the time of the Empire's origins, making a humble bullet into an ultra-devastating machine. Today, with all the improvements to the firing charges, a traditional firearm can propel a round of unstable heavy metal — enriched Tranekkon for the most part — at almost 20,000 kilometers per second, which means they instantly generate a maximum kinetic effect at the point of impact, leaving behind them a flight path strewn with the most spectacular waste products. Even the smallest-caliber lady's handgun can make an entry hole the size of a golden kublar and an exit hole as big as the turbine of a heavy battleship.

In addition, the projectiles' range has also been drastically improved. Today, they can cover a few dozen kilometers in standard gravity, which means that a man controlling one or more weapons can carry out a light infantry tactical operation entirely on his own. Of course, the armor of soldiers in battle has been improved as well, but the offensive weapons still maintain a great advantage. For example, two multi-cogans mounted on the back of an old glider vehicle, outfitted with automatic targeting for greater efficiency, can boast firepower equivalent to that of a basic tank. Once all the various existing options are introduced — night vision, laser sighting, automatic target acquisition, to name only the most common — the range of possibilities suddenly seems endless.

Another significant improvement is the considerable widening of the range of ammunition. The destructive effect of traditional arms is multiplied many times by the introduction of different kinds of energy — plasma is ideal for clearing an entire area, laser rays burn and incinerate, Gauss-type electromagnetism disrupts both the electro-neurological balance of living creatures and the stability of electronic machinery, and sonic energy upsets the atomic cohesion of whatever it encounters.

Multi-cogan

Most recent product of the Empire's official armory, the multi-cogan has been used to equip the Endoguard troops for some time now. It is a devastating weapon, in some ways the ultimate synthesis of all previous forms of heavy artillery put together. Indeed, it combines the powerful effect of a traditional weapon with all other types of energy: plasma, laser, gauss, and even sonic. Suitable for any type of combat, it suits the infantry's needs perfectly, also featuring a vibro-bayonet for hand-to-hand combat and a rocket-launcher option that renders the hard-to-carry mortars obsolete.

Conceived, designed, and developed by the research department of the Church of the Industrial Saints, the multi-cogan is manufactured on the industrial planet Cogana II, in the Whakk system, owned by the family of the Poly-Romanoffs. Despite a fairly high volume of production, this weapon remains difficult to obtain, because sales are strictly monitored. Wholesale, it costs nearly 3,500 kublars, but its price on the black market can reach staggering heights, and possessing one without a license results in the penalty of instant death.

Technical Specifications: Ninety-two centimeters long without the vibro-bayonet, an unloaded multi-cogan only weighs 376 grams. An energy cartridge — for 150 plasma, laser, sonic, or Gauss shots — adds 127 grams to its total weight. A cartridge of traditional ammunition, on the other hand, will weigh much more. A cartridge of one hundred twenty .753 caliber rounds can weigh between 653 and 892 grams, depending on the metal in question. There is an extremely wide range of grenade and rocket options, and the weight of each cartridge averages around 700 grams. All traditional multi-cogan ammunition comes in a "dum-dum" format, which has an absolutely devastating effect. On the automatic setting, the rate of fire is 1,200 shots per minute, which means the weapon needs to be fed at very high speed.

There is a switch to change it from the automatic to a single-shot setting, and also to change between energy modes. When one load is empty, it will automatically switch to the next. And finally, no matter what caliber is being used, epyphite counter-balancing totally eliminates the effect of recoil. Fire Rate: 3 (laser); 1 (mini-grenade). Range: 3-75/150/300 (laser); 5-25/100/200 (mini-grenade). Damage: 6D (laser); 4D+2 (mini-grendae); STR+1D+2 (vibro-bayonet).

Price: Officially — 3,400 kublars. On the black market — astronomical.

Availability: Almost nil. The weapon is mostly unavailable and unauthorized ownership is punishable by instant death.

Reliability: No mechanical failure has ever been reported.

Cogan 45

The cogan 45 is a much simpler weapon than the multi-cogan, and much more easily obtainable on the arms market. Its limited range of ammunition makes it a less-sophisticated weapon, and not as effective. At the time of its introduction, it was thought that plasma cartridges represented the most advanced type of firepower, but it soon became clear that different types of energy would suit different combat situations. Although there are scenarios where the cogan 45 is ideal, it demonstrates its limitations in all other cases. That said, coming face to face with a plasma shot is never a pleasant experience. It is a contest from which the human body rarely emerges victorious.

Despite its drawbacks, the cogan 45 is a godsend to companies of mercenaries, pirate hordes, the standing army of the Colonial planets and bands of motivated Psycho-Anarchists.

Technical Specifications: Measuring 107 centimeters overall, it weighs 352 grams without energy cartridges. It presents a very different appearance to the multi-cogan, coming in the shape of a long tube. The rear part rests atop the shooter's shoulder — like a rocket-launcher — with the aiming device and trigger in front. Each cartridge provides power for 100 shots, but the gun can accommodate preloading of up to three cartridges. It takes between two and three seconds to reload the weapon. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-50/100/300. Damage: 5D.

Price: Sold officially at a price of 1,200 kublars, the cogan 45 sells on the black market at a price varying according to its condition.

Availability: Optimal. Produced in enormous quantities, it is available in every corner of the Empire, although ownership is of course regulated.

Reliability: Excellent reliability overall, but some problems with its energy cartridges have been reported, especially in moist environments.

Epyphite Counter-Balancing

This is an extremely delicate operation consisting of introducing one or a few molecules of this precious substance into the weapons to eliminate certain debilitating characteristics such as weight or recoil. Determining the precise quantity and positioning of the epiphyte requires calculations that only a few hyperspecialized Mentreks can carry out. The slightest error will render the weapon unusable, by keeping it angled downwards or upwards, or sending it drifting into the air, devoid of all weight.

Cogan 78

Intermediate model between the cogan 45 and the multi-cogan, the cogan 78 corrects some of the deficiencies of the model it replaces, most notably re-introducing traditional high-impact rounds. Nonetheless, unlike the multi-cogan in which the different modes are perfectly interchangeable, the cogan 78 cannot claim true versatility. Although it can fire both traditional rounds and energy charges, it cannot switch automatically between the two modes, and it takes approximately ten seconds to switch it over manually. In addition to this shortcoming, the choice of caliber is limited (it cannot shoot rockets or grenades), while its energy is highly inefficient: each cartridge only provides power for 50 laser shots.

Technical Specifications: Weighing 1,245 grams and measuring a meter long, the cogan 78 certainly improves on the cogan 45, but does not even approach the perfection attained by its successor. Its cartridge of one hundred .753 caliber traditional rounds ensures sufficient firepower, although the rapid-fire setting only allows three-shot bursts. Without epyphite counter-balancing, it has a strong recoil that makes it difficult to use over a long period of time. In energy mode, its performance is comparable to that of the cogan 45. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-50/90/200 (traditional); 3-50/100/250 (energy). Damage: 3D+2 (traditional); 4D+2 (energy). Note: Every 10 rounds, user receives a cumulative -1D penalty to his *firearms* skill for fatigue.

Price: Once the multi-cogan was put into production, manufacture of the cogan 78 was halted — which is not the case with the cogan 45. Therefore, it is no longer officially sold. However, it has not yet become rare, so its black market cost is still affordable. A cogan 78 in good condition will go for 2,000 kublars.

Availability: As an intermediary model, it was not in production for a very long time. So it is not available in large quantities. At the same time, it is not in very high demand, so it is easy to find in stock.

Reliability: Its relatively low level of complexity ensures exceptional reliability.

Integrated 1K8 Gun

The Integrated 1K8 is a weapon for the strong only. Just handling it requires considerable force. But in exchange, it also performs at a very high standard.

Depending on what rounds are used, the Integrated 1K8 can theoretically penetrate any type of armor, except of course White Netranekkon. Despite its heavy weight, it is a strong and reliable weapon that almost always delivers and often tips the balance in any exchange.

Technical Specifications: From stock to muzzle, the Integrated 1K8 only measures ninety-six centimeters, but it

Cogan 45

Cogan 78

Multi-cogan

Integrated 1K8 Gun

weighs 5,241 grams unloaded. Since it is equipped with three barrels of different caliber, it can hold three cartridges. A 600-round cartridge weighs 1,153 grams in the small-caliber .753, 1,546 grams in the medium-caliber .951, and 2,268 grams in the mammoth caliber 19. For the larger caliber, rounds of enriched Tranekkon are available, whose effect is comparable to a small ballistic missile. The total weight of the gun is about ten kilos. Mercifully, the weapon is equipped with epyphite counter-balancing, without which it would not be humanly possible to operate. A dual switch on the stock allows the alternation between one caliber and another, and from rapid-fire mode to single-shot mode. It is theoretically possible to fire all three barrels at once. Some have claimed to use all three barrels at once in rapid-fire mode, but no witness has ever confirmed this assertion. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-30/80/250. Damage: 3D+2 (small caliber); 5D (medium caliber); 9D (large caliber).

Price: Officially, the Integrated 1K8 costs the same as the multi-cogan, but there is a much longer waiting period to acquire it. This limited-edition weapon is sold extremely infrequently. On the black market, its price reaches mind-boggling heights. Many pirates, gang warlords, and other outlaws have announced that they have bought one for 10,000 kublars or more.

Availability: Minimal. This item is normally unavailable and unauthorized ownership results in instant death. Only a true outlaw would even consider possessing one.

Reliability: No type of mechanical failure has ever been reported.

Sonic Bazooka, or "Heavy Sonic"

Created by civilian technology, this powerfully destructive energy weapon emits precisely focused wave-beams that disrupt the atomic cohesion of solid bodies. At its inception, it was used in mining operations as a replacement for explosives, but humankind's creative genius quickly found other applications for it. Since then, the sonic bazooka is standard equipment for all infantry units. Although unusable in extra-atmospheric environments, the damage it does to pressurized environments is substantial. Any poor unprotected soul in the path of a violent sonic-wave will feel his skull explode instantly, before he has any chance of escape. Without countermeasures, no armor can resist it. An internal spectrometric analyzer determines the optimal frequency to disrupt the internal structure of matter.

Technical Specifications: With a length of 150 centimeters and a weight of 7,256 grams — 9,198 with the tripod — the sonic bazooka is somewhat unwieldy. However, it is not specifically designed for individual use, but more as a support weapon for a division of troops. In the Empire, the usual estimate is one sonic for every ten fighters. A powerful and effective weapon, the sonic also uses a lot of energy, because one energy cartridge is only enough for 10 shots. Fire Rate: 1.

Range: 3-50/100/200. Damage: 9D

Price: With an official price of 2,600 kublars, it is much more expensive on the black market, for it is a rare and highly prized weapon.

Availability: Minimal. Sale of this weapon is prohibited to civilians. Local militia is often equipped with it. It is also fairly common to find industrial versions adapted from their original design to a military capacity.

Reliability: As a product of time-tested technology, the sonic bazooka is absolutely reliable.

Disintegrator 48

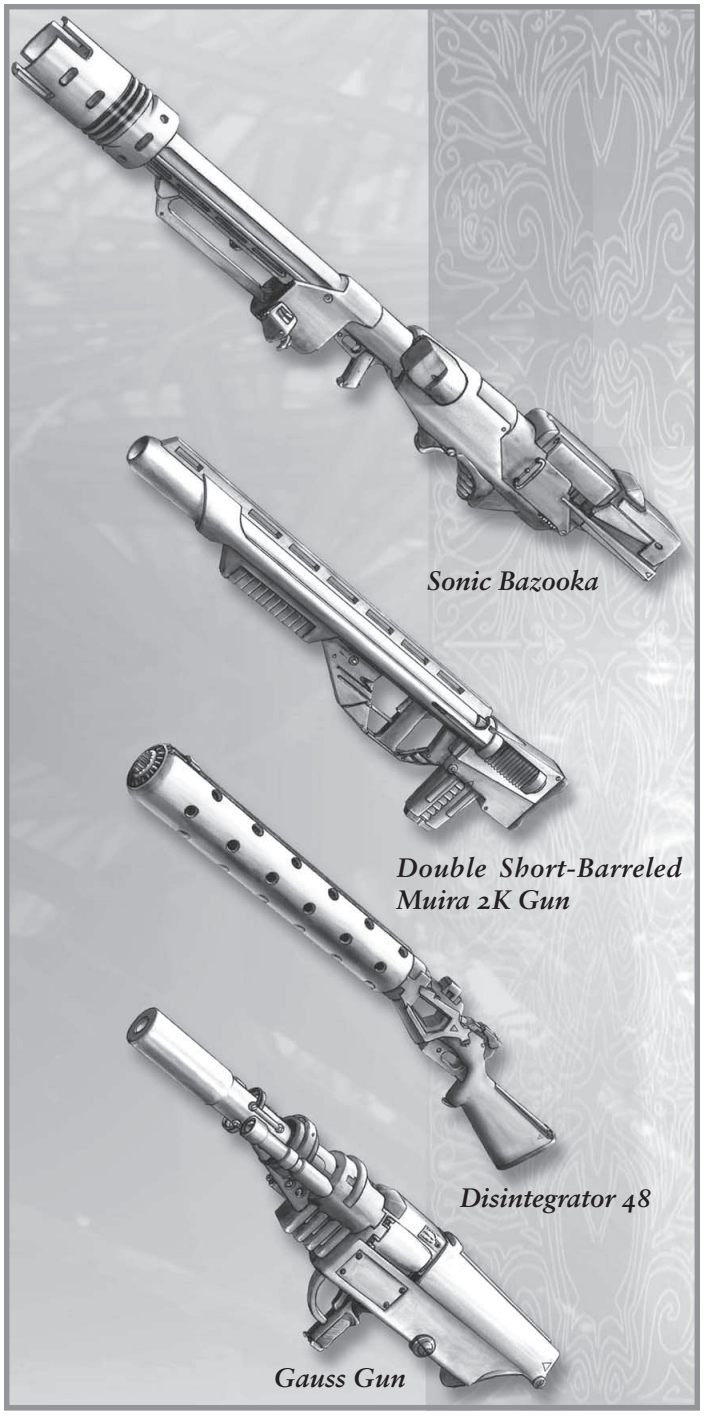
Official weapon of the Hunchback corps, the Prez's private guard in the Endocities, the disintegrator 48 is the most terrifying single weapon currently available in the Empire. Based on secret technology developed by the Church of the Industrial Saints, it remains under the strict control of the Techno-Technos, because it can only be used by their most brutal henchmen. Although the Hunchbacks use it freely to subdue crowds, it can hardly be considered an anti-riot weapon. Far from dispersing rioters, it simply annihilates them, leaving behind nothing but a pile of steaming corpses.

Technical Specifications: Heavy yet compact — 120 centimeters long overall, and weighing 1,268 grams without its energy cartridge — the disintegrator 48 shoots long and highly deadly rays. The ray drastically increases the internal temperature of any organism unfortunate enough to get in its way. The organism's vital fluids start to boil and its organs and tissues literally explode. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-20/75/120. Damage: 12D.

Price: The disintegrator 48 is not for sale under any circumstances. Occasionally, a model stolen from the Hunchbacks will make its way to the black market, but at an exorbitant price.

Availability: Minimal. The discovered possessor of a disintegrator 48 will not only incur the risk of instant death but also the possibility of being "remodeled" into a Hunchback.

Reliability: As the unfortunate populations of the Endocities can attest, there is no more reliable weapon than the disintegrator 48.



Double Short-Barreled Muira 2K Gun

Originally, the Muira 2K was a fairly innocuous weapon intended for use by anti-riot troops in the Endocities, or on worlds with rioting populations. It has a pair of short barrels, and although the caliber is far from commonplace, the gun is not technologically sophisticated in the slightest. The barrels are capable of launching gas canisters — tear gas, laughing gas, neuro-paralysis gas — to an incredible range. Under standard gravity, it can hurl a 350-gram cartridge up to twelve kilometers. At point blank range, the damage inflicted is considerable. Cybo-cop reports make frequent mention of humans literally perforated by the canisters.

This extraordinary power brought the gun back to popularity. Pirates, Psycho Anarchists, and other outlaws began to manufacture small shells to fit the chambers of the Muira 2K, as well as dum-dum charges and incredibly devastating grenade rounds. Once this "upgraded" Muira 2K came into fashion, all official copies of the weapon were stolen. Its small size makes it the ideal weapon for urban combat, but authorities consider possession of the weapon as punishable by instant death.

Technical Specifications: Only forty-two centimeters from muzzle to stock, an empty Muira 2K nonetheless weighs a hefty 758 grams. When loaded, its weight varies depending on the ammunition it contains. Its primary shortcoming is that it must be reloaded after every two shots, but after such a horrendous round of fire there is usually a deafening calm and a brief pause in which to carry out the operation. The colossal recoil requires two hands to manage, and even so it must be gripped very

tightly. After all, it is a weapon that was originally designed for cybo-cops. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-100/6000/12000. Damage: Canisters do 5D at less than three meters; canisters that get the chance to explode do damage baesd on their contents (for example, tear gas and laughing gas incapacitate victims in a 100-square-meter area for fifteen minutes).

Price: The Muira 2K is no longer sold officially, but it is easily obtained from other sources. The price varies according to its condition, and what ammunition it holds, usually averaging around the 1,000-kublar mark.

Availability: On the black market, it is very easy to obtain.

Reliability: At the point of manufacture, the weapon is very simple and totally reliable. However, once adaptations have been made, the Muira K's reliability will vary widely depending on the quality of the "alterations."

Gauss Gun

A purely energy-based weapon, the gauss gun emits an electromagnetic ray that has a double effect: it disrupts the operation of electronic systems and devices, and paralyses the neurological system of living beings. Originally designed as an anti-riot gun, the gauss gun has gradually been adapted for other uses, particularly electronic interference. Although it is easy to defend against this ray — a simple force field or barrier will suffice — such measures are extremely costly, and one instant of inattention is enough.

Technical Specifications: The gauss gun is rather cumbersome. It is only 108 centimeters long, and weighs 968 grams without its energy cartridges, but the generator that sits on top of the stock is very obtrusive. Each energy cartridge provides enough power for twenty-five shots. While each ray's power remains constant, its range and diffusion can be adjusted in inverse proportion to each other. On the "pinpoint" setting, its range can exceed 100 meters. On the other hand, when all the way open, the gauss gun is only effective up to three meters. Fire Rate: 1. Range (examples): 3/—/— (full wide setting); 3-5/15/60 (medium wide setting); 3-10/30/120 (pinpoint setting). Damage: 5D stun. Note: Full wide setting affects forty targets, medium wide setting affects twenty targets, and needle setting affects one target.

Price: In official circles, the gauss gun sells for 750 kublars per unit. On the black market, its price varies according to condition, but it isn't hard to find.

Availability: Minimal. It exists on the black market in high quantities, but its use is highly restricted.

Reliability: The gun is very reliable, but its delicate mechanisms require meticulous care.

These Ropes that Whistle over Our Heads…

Fruit of an audacious genetic crossbreeding between an Agolan creeper and the paleo-cobra, the rope of Nuv-Rohp (a small planet from the Givem sub-system) combines the qualities of a classic rope in teflo-hemp fibers (very high resistance to tensile strength, absolutely rot proof) with the specific aptitudes of tension and movement (crawling silently, instant acceleration, prodigious leaps) of a gigantic snake. Paying for it isn't enough to acquire this marvel, for a particular bond must be established between the rope and its owner.

The rope has to be charmed… (Very Difficult Persuasion roll to charm. Succeeding gains the charmer a rope with the following characteristics: brawling 8D+2, running 7D, sneak 8D, Strength 6D+2, climb/jump 9D, lift 8D+1; Move: 20. The rope will follow the orders of its owner without question. To figure the length, roll one Wild Die and multiply the result by 100 feet.)

Laser Gun

With similar mechanisms as the cogan 45, the laser gun is an energy weapon that produces a burning effect. The laser's destructive beam is somewhat more narrow than that of the plasma's, with slightly lower energy consumption, so the laser gun is often considered an inferior predecessor to the cogan 45. That said, it is effective and is the standard weapon of many forces, both official and unofficial.

Technical Specifications: The laser gun is one meter long and weighs 996 grams without energy cartridges. Each cartridge provides enough power for seventy-five shots. The laser beam's focus is adjustable, which varies the range in an inverse proportion. On its finest setting, the weapon can reach up to 5,000 meters, which makes it an effective weapon for sharpshooters, because it is totally silent and inflicts material damage to any element that can be burned. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-50/100/300 (wide)to 3-500/1500/5000 (narrow). Damage: 4D. Note: Widest setting can hit ten targets, while narrow setting can hit one.

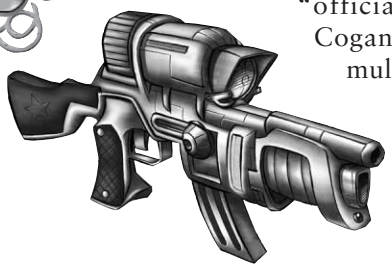
Price: Officially, the laser gun is worth 1100 kublars. The price varies on the black market, and there is never a shortage of buyers.

Availability: Minimal. Ownership is regulated. But taking both military and civilian populations into account, it is probably the most well-distributed weapon in the universe.

Reliability: Although generally reliable, the laser gun requires constant maintenance. Serious defects have been reported, resulting from either sabotage or negligence.

Poly AKA-4 Assault Rifle

Signature weapon of all the outcasts in the universe, the Poly AKA-4 is the crowning achievement of the Troglosocialik arms factories. Totally devoid of any refinement, this assault rifle is simple but effective — it can be subjected to any conditions and is ideally suited for guerilla actions in any environment. Its strongest points are its reliability and ease of repair. In certain isolated areas, there are troops making do with models that still function with all their parts replaced. The closest comparison with the Empire's



"official" weapons is the Cogan 78, because of its multiple functions. The Poly AKA-4 fires both energy shots and traditional ammunition.

Technical Specifications: The Poly AKA-4 is average size (eighty-nine centimeters) and average weight (874 grams unloaded). In its energy mode, it shoots long streaks of plasma, whose strength and range cannot be adjusted. Each cartridge provides sixty shots. It can also shoot traditional projectiles of a unique caliber, close to the .753 but not quite identical. If the occasion arises, slight structural modifications will permit both types to be used. The weapon's standard cartridges contain 100 rounds, but customized versions abound. Many eyewitnesses have reported cartridges of 1,000 rounds or more. It is important to note that, unlike the cogan 78, the Poly AKA-4's rapid-fire mode is a genuine one. The demonic staccato of its fire is familiar throughout the Empire. Of course, the weapon has no epyphite counter-balancing, and using it in rapid-fire mode is extremely difficult. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-40/90/275. Damage: 3D+1 (traditional); 5D (energy). Note: When in rapid-fire mode, reduce user's *firearms* skill by -2D and multiply the damage by 2. A 1 on the Wild Die indicates the gun had faulty parts; the gun explodes and does 4D f damge to its user.

Price: The Poly AKA-4 sells for approximately 350 kublars. On some worlds, it is given free to every citizen.

Availability: Optimal. Manufactured by the hundreds of thousands of habitants on the Colonial Planets, the Poly AKA-4 is the easiest weapon to obtain in the whole universe.

Reliability: On the whole, the Poly AKA-4 is very reliable, due to its great simplicity. However, due to a shortage of manufacturing materials, some models contain defects.

Hand-Held Guns

Technologically speaking, hand-held guns have made the same advances as heavy artillery. There have been improvements to ammunition, materials, and energy sources.

Although these pistols may not be as powerful or precise as the heavier weapons, their overall effectiveness lies in their greater handling ability and ease of use.

Many of them represent sawn-off versions of the heavy models. In this category are the hand-held laser and the hand-held cogan — rare indeed, manufactured in minuscule quantities as a badge of honor for Endoguard officers.

Supra-pistol

An extremely powerful energy weapon, the suprapistol shoots plasma rays up to fifty meters with extreme precision. Up to about twenty meters, any shot is fatal.

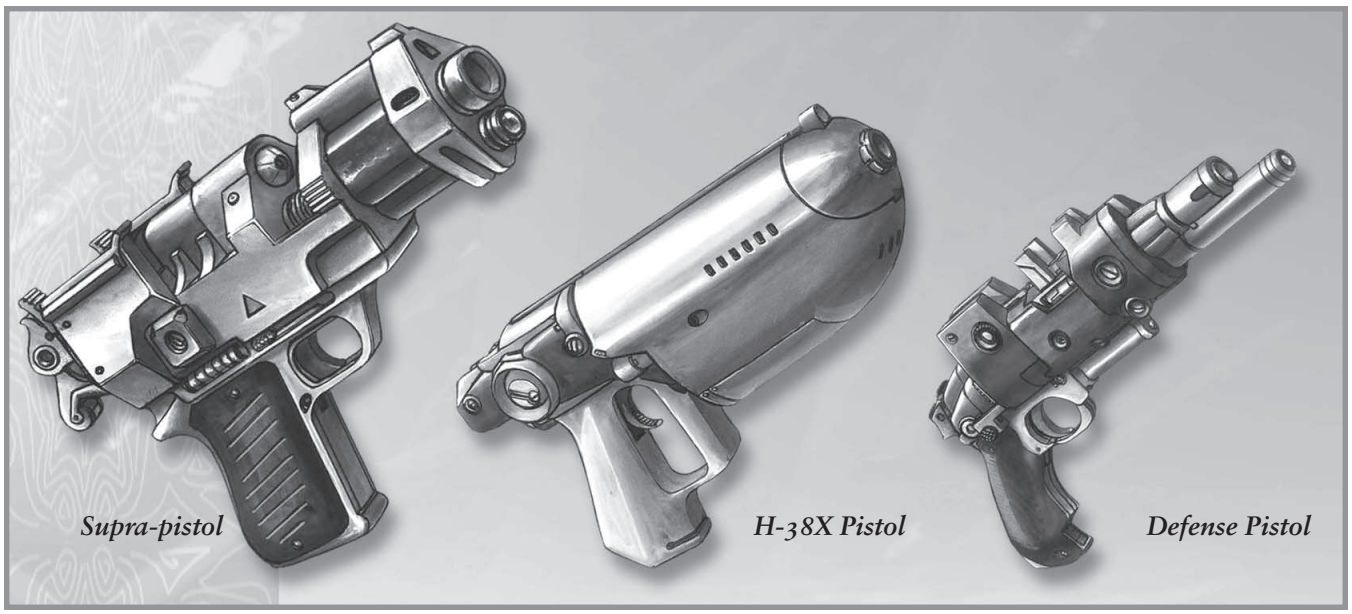
This weapon is standard equipment for most officers of the Empire's armed forces. The energy cartridge's large capacity — 100 shots — makes it suitable for combat support.

Technical Specifications: The suprapistol is twenty-three centimeters long, but due to materials used in its manufacture, it weighs only 254 grams unloaded. It is easy to handle, and can be concealed without the slightest sign. The standard cartridge — available anywhere in the Empire — only adds 110 grams to the weight of the weapon, and provides plenty of power. The cartridge fits into the butt of the gun. Fire Rate: 2. Range: 3-20/50/75. Damage: 5D.

Price: The suprapistol is sold officially for 350 kublars. It is also found on the black market, where prices vary according to its condition.

Availability: Optimal, but uncommon. Ownership is regulated, but it is so easily concealed that it can be carried anywhere without great risk of discovery.

Reliability: The suprapistol is absolutely reliable, but long exposure to humid conditions may lead to energy loss.



Viper Pistol

Manufactured by the Viper Arms Corporation, under control of the Maganat of the Poly-Romanoffs, the Viper Pistol is the civilian equivalent of the suprapistol. Its qualities are roughly comparable to those of its twin model except for a slightly weaker energy capacity.

To justify its civilian status, most models of the Viper Pistol features a nonlethal mode, which merely renders its target unconscious.

Technical Specifications: Twenty-five centimeters long and weighing 350 grams unloaded, the Viper Pistol can fire fifty shots before requiring reloading. It accepts the standard cartridge, which fits into the butt of the gun. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-10/30/60. Damage: 4D. Note: Nonlethal mode does the same damage as lethal mode, except that it is taken only as stun damage.

Price: Pride of the civilian weapons markets, the Viper Pistol with nonletahl mode sells everywhere at a flat price of 500 kublars. (It's 300 kublars without the nonlethal mode.) Ownership is regulated, so it's a good idea to have one's papers in order before buying one officially. Otherwise, it can be found on the black market at prices that vary depending on its condition.

Availability: Optimal, though a permit is required in many places.

Reliability: No problems have ever been reported.

Party Favors, Viruses, and Bacteria…

To end a memorable Endocity visit, why not bring back for your enemies a sample of the famous Merope virus? Or better yet, the new and improved Biophage 13X virus, the latest to come out of the Biotech Inc. Plus laboratories. Immediately fatal, these marvels of genetic technology procure a heinous and explosive death. Useful precaution: remember to equip yourself with elephantodonte's milk from Garligue, Amourine, or better with a proto-mineral cloner for complete immunization.

Defense Pistol

The term "defense pistol" does not apply to a specific model but rather to a group of models, with their reduced size and diminished power in common.

These laser-type pistols can fire a maximum of only five shots. These guns are at their best when hidden under the pilot seat of a small ship, concealed in the fold of a coat, or even hidden in a sleeve or pen case.

Technical Specifications: The defense pistols are the smallest guns on the market, with the largest one measuring only ten centimeters, and weighing just over 180 grams, while the smallest model in production measures a mere 4.78 centimeters, weighing 78 grams when unloaded. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-5/9/15. Damage:3D.

Price: The price varies depending on the model and its quality, but usually averages around 300 kublars.

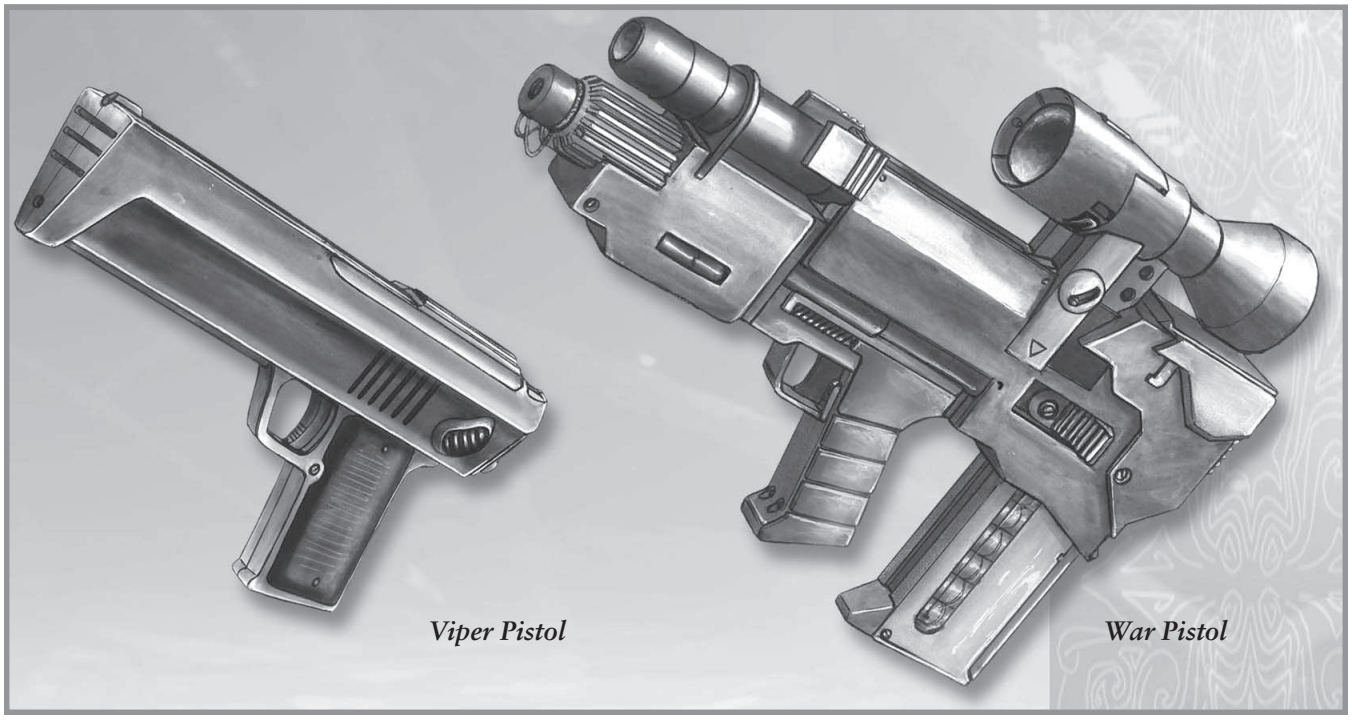
Availability: Optimal.

Reliability: The technology is well tested and perfectly reliable.

War Pistol

As the suprapistol's younger relative, the war pistol is standard equipment for troops in the Empire's armed forces.

It is a powerful energy weapon, and roughly offers the same qualities as the suprapistol. Its energy cartridges,



Viper Pistol

War Pistol

inserted into the butt of the gun, provide enough power for seventy-five shots.

Technical Specifications: The war pistol is only 19.86 centimeters long — smaller than the suprapistol — but nonetheless weighs approximately the same: 249 grams unloaded. Despite its apparent compactness, its large chamber makes concealment difficult. The war pistol uses the standard cartridge, inserted into the butt, that allows seventy-five shots. Fire Rate: 2. Range: 3-15/45/70. Damage: 4D+2.

Price: Officially, the war pistol sells for about 300 kublars, depending on what rank of officer it was designed for. Since it is only intended for military use, it is not usually available for single purchase. On the black market, however, it can be found in abundance.

Availability: Minimal, at least officially.

Reliability: The war pistol is completely reliable.

H-38X Pistol, or "Hypodermic"

Ideal anti-riot weapon, the H-38X pistol shoots small needles containing a toxic and corrosive substance up to a distance of 500 meters. They shatter on impact and the contents begin to take effect: it dissolves through fabric, in order to paralyze the nervous system.

The chemicals are only effective through textile-based clothing. They have no effect on electronic devices and equipment.

Technical Specifications: A weapon that combines traditional projectiles with energy propulsion, the hypodermic pistol is suited only to certain specific uses. If used strategically, however, it can work wonders. Rather discreet, it only measures seventeen centimeters — or twenty-eight centimeters with the addition of a barrel for long-distance accuracy — and weighs 236 grams when empty. The fifty-round cartridge fits into the butt of the gun. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-100/200/500. Damage: 6D stun. Note: Damage is inflicted on organic materials and creatures only.

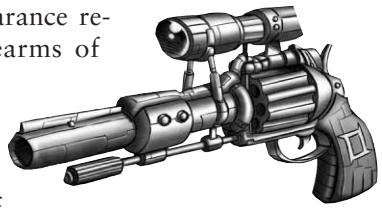
Price: Produced only in small quantities, the hypodermic pistol costs 500 kublars in official circles.

Availability: Minimal. The hypodermic pistol is a nonlethal weapon, but since the authorities are aware that it can be easily adapted to more deadly uses, ownership is regulated.

Reliability: Excellent.

Vis Pacem Revolver

This extremely rare weapon is manufactured in minute quantities by the Church of the Industrial Saints, based on advanced technologies that few human brains can comprehend. Nonetheless, its outward appearance resembles the paleo-firearms of Terra Prima.



With its revolving cylinder and "blue-steel" finish, it brings to mind the .44 magnum of the paleo-arms manufacturer Smith and Wesson, or the Dan Wesson long barrel, two models that have entirely disappeared, their silhouette familiar only to paleo-archive enthusiasts. But appearances can be deceptive, because one single Vis Pacem is enough to overcome the defenses of a space battlecruiser, reducing it to wreckage.

Technical Specifications: Thirty-one centimeters long from the butt to the tip of the barrel, the Vis Pacem is an imposing weapon indeed. But it weighs only 398 grams, including ammunition. As a showcase for the Church of the Industrial Saints, it is composed of high-performance materials that are an optimal mix of lightness and durability. The pearl-handled grip is a work of art. Aesthetic considerations aside, the ballistic qualities are what make the Vis Pacem a terrifying weapon of death. The cylinder contains seven rounds — of a caliber comparable to the .753 — similar in appearance to paleo-ammunition, but in fact quite different. First of all, the propulsive charge is not traditional gunpowder. It is an energy concentrate whose explosive power is of course much greater. And of course the bullet is not just a leaden mass. It's a round of anti-matter. Upon impact, the anti-matter is released and obliterates an equal quantity of matter to create huge gaps. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 3-15/35/75 space units (space); 6-35/75/150 km (atmosphere). Damage: 7D (battleship scale.)

Price: The Vis Pacem is not intended for sale. The rare copies produced are exclusively for the officials of the Church of the Industrial Saints.

Availability: Minimal.

Reliability: As a product of extremely high and holy technology, the Vis Pacem will never malfunction.

Great Balls of Fire!

In order to enhance their vital forces and energies at the moment of attack, seasoned mercenaries use a longtime proven device that is small but effective. Sold at an average price of 45 kublars, the "Gonado-Energizer" is placed on the perineum, point of equilibrium of the Yin and Yang currents and the laterality poles. Activated, it emits a variable frequency determined in function and according to the parameters of each individual with infra-vibratory impulses that maximize energy concentration. Fierceness in battle is fantastically increased tenfold, but (small side effect) appetites and other erectile functions are also exacerbated. (The device gives +5D to all combat skills when used, and difficulties for Perception skills and willpower are increased by +10).

Bladed Weapons

Despite the ancient associations of Terra Prima they conjure, bladed weapons are highly esteemed throughout the Empire. Not only does a sharp edge remain highly effective against any defenseless bio-organism, but the traditional blades have been improved greatly by the benefits of modern technology; they now boast ultra-resistant materials and many new options, some amusing and some extremely deadly.

To see someone leaping around after being poked with a vibro-dagger

would draw a smile from the most solemn Techno-Techno dignitary.

But aside from these considerations, bladed weapons will always be highly sought by the Nobles, who love to parade around with a sword at their side.

Paleo-sword

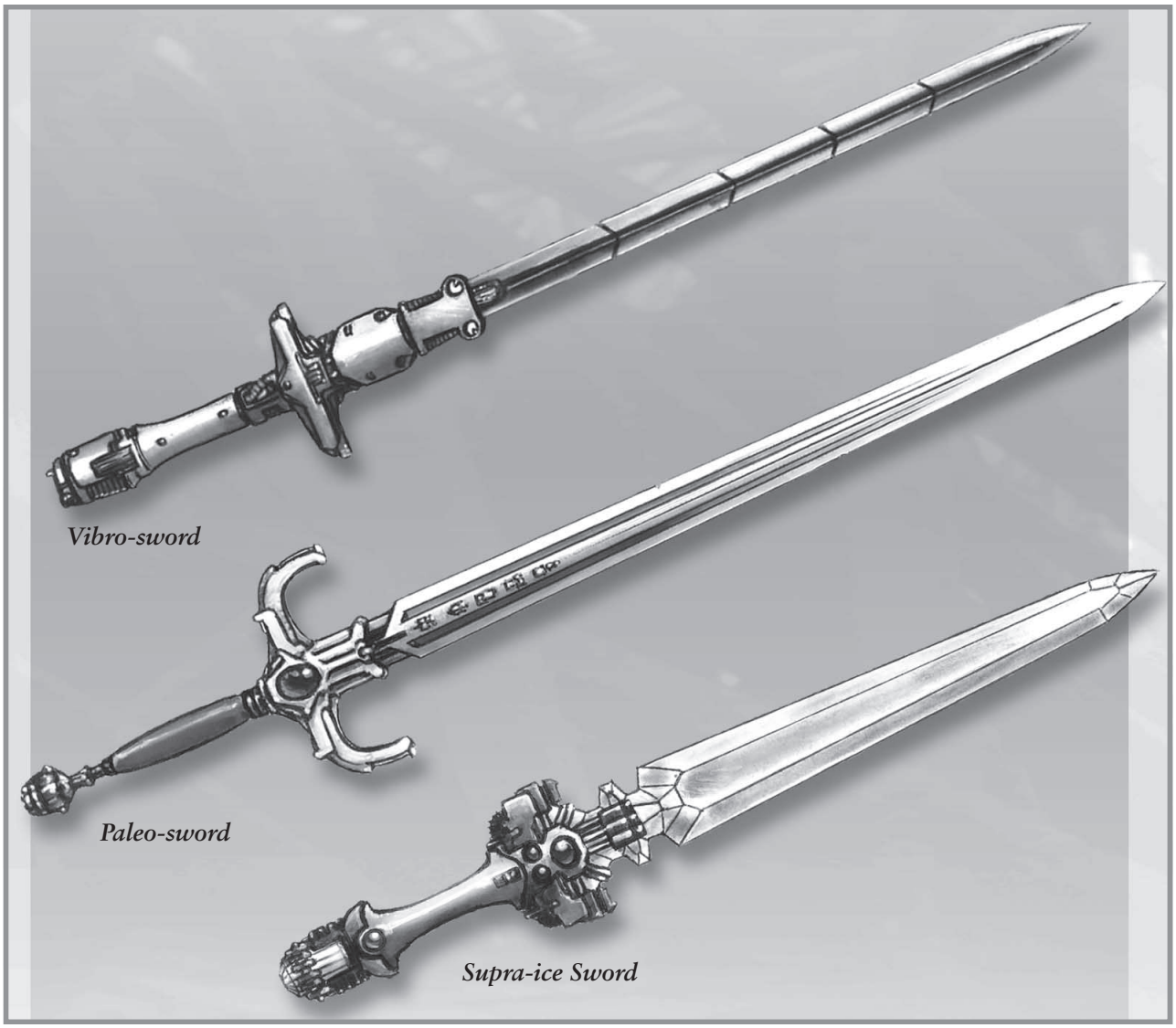
Fruit of the immemorial wisdom of the master armorers of Terra Prima, authentic paleo-swords are rarities particularly prized and admired. Although these relics are often nothing but worn blades corroded by rust, some of these marvels have emerged from the mists of time intact, as magnificent and sparkling as the day they were created. In response to demand from a Nobility eager for antiquities, a specialized micro-industry sprang up throughout the Empire. Of course, the modern imitations do not have the same style of the respected ancient weapons, even though the modern materials give them qualities that the inhabitants of paleo-Terra Prima could never have dreamed of. Then again, another advantage of authentic paleo-swords is that some of them are enchanted, carrying a mystical power that makes those who know how to use them utterly invincible.

Technical Specifications: Whether true paleo-weapon or contemporary replica, all the swords have in common an elongated shape and a cutting blade. Nonetheless, an infinite number of variables makes each one a unique product: light or heavy, for two hands or one, simple or sheathed hilt, curved or straight blade, and so forth. Skill: *Archaic weapons*. Difficulty: Easy (10). Damage: STR+2D. Note: these game characteristics are for straight, one-handed swords.

Price: Paleo-swords vary in price according to a great number of criteria. A chipped and rusted blade might be worth a fortune if some famous origin can be certified. Conversely, a magnificently forged teflo-steel blade will be worth very little if it is a model produced in great quantity by an Industrial Maganat. On average, the price will range between 1 and 1000 kublars, but only an expert would risk making a purchase at the upper end of the spectrum.

Availability: Optimal. No permit is required to buckle a sword to one's belt.

Reliability: Modern imitation paleo-swords are extremely durable, unlike the older models which occasionally shatter. On the other hand, the fortunate owner of a genuine enchanted sword can rely on it under any circumstances.



Paleo-spear

Like paleo-swords, paleo-spears are coming back into vogue. Of course, it is not as common to see someone carrying one, but there are many who claim to possess in their home one of the mythical lances used by some paleo-hero on paleo-Terra Prima to slay one of the dragons thta must have run across that land in great numbers…

Here as well, imitations abound, but what is lost in authenticity is generally made up for by greater resilience.

Technical Specifications: These weapons come in a wide range of styles and uses, from the light javelin to the heavy pilum, even including the formal halberd. Generally, they measure between 160 and 260 centimeters from base to point, and weigh anywhere from 1.5 kilos to 5 kilos or more. Skill: *Archaic weapons.* Difficulty: Easy (10). Damage: 4D (thrown); STR+1D+2 (melee). Thrown Range: 5-15/25/40.

Price: As with paleo-swords, the price of paleo-spears varies on a number of criteria that are difficult to determine. Nonetheless, a price range of 1 to 1000 kublars is reasonably accurate.

Availability: Optimal. No license is required to either own or carry a spear.

Reliability: A spear's effectiveness depends on the quality of the material it is composed of. If designed to be thrown, its quality depends on the skill and experience of the manufacturer who made it.

Supra-ice Sword

Although at first glance it cannot be distinguished from a paleo-sword, the supra-ice sword is definitely a modern weapon. Secretly manufactured in some Techno-Techno factory, the supra-ice sword unites the handling and cutting qualities of a traditional sword with a deadly efficiency provided by this era of all-powerful technology. The blade, made of a highly super-conducting alloy, can reach a temperature of absolute zero. The slightest contact transmits an intense cold right to the core of any matter it touches. Living tissues are frozen instantly, and become as hard as glass. Even if they don't shatter, the thermal shock will irreversibly lead to dead tissue. This extremely dangerous weapon must be handled with great care. To carry it, a special thermo-isolating sheath is most warmly recommended.

Technical Specifications: This weapon is manufactured singly and to order, so the blade's shape is left to the client. The alloy itself is tinted a pretty blue, and can be worked to accommodate ornamentation. Both the blade's handle and its sheath are made of thermo-isolating material, and the hilt of the sword encloses a powerful generator. Each energy cartridge allows it to be used at full power for 100 hours. During the last hour of power, the blade's temperature gradually climbs back up toward ambient temperature. Of course, supra-ice mode can be switched off at any time. Skill: *Melee combat.* Difficulty: Easy (10). Damage: STR+5D (supra-ice mode); STR+2D (unpowered).

Price: This is a weapon of prestige and is reserved for an elite and select clientele, who must attain some merit in the eyes of the Church of the Industrial Saints. Without added options, the base price is 5,000 kublars.

Availability: Minimal. Ownership is not regulated, but the C.I.S. has exacting guidelines as to who is allowed to own one.

Reliability: As a Techno-Techno product, the supra-ice sword is 100 percent reliable. However, also as a Techno-Techno product, it is difficult to know who the blade's true master is.

Vibro-sword

This is a modern sword, but it can pass as an ancient one thanks to its appearance. In addition to a sword's usual functions, the vibro-sword has an energized hilt that transmits an ultra-rapid vibration to the blade. In vibro-mode, with its small characteristic hum, the power of the sword is increased tenfold. And since it is made of extremely hard material, it cuts effortlessly into flesh and bone, breaks through the more basic defenses and can even penetrate certain armor.

Technical Specifications: This mass-market weapon has the same characteristics of a paleo-sword, but only allows the choice of three different serrated blades. The energy cartridge fits into the hilt to supply power to the generator. Each cartridge provides 20 hours of use at full power. Due to the materials used, the weight of the whole sword including the cartridge never exceeds 1.5 kilos. Skill: *Melee combat.* Difficulty: Easy (10). Damage: STR+12D (vibro-mode); STR+2D (unpowered).

Price: This popular weapon has an official price of about 150 kublars.

Availability: Optimal. Ownership is regulated, but those who carry one simply pretend it's a paleo-sword.

Reliability: Excellent reliability overall. However, like all energy weapons, the vibro-sword does not respond well to prolonged exposure to humidity.

Vibro-axe

Far more ostentatious than the vibro-sword, the vibro-axe is the weapon of choice for all those who want to proclaim to the universe that they love brawls and blood. It can inflict the same wounds as a traditional axe, but can also deliver unrivalled cutting power. The generator at the base of the shaft sets the blade vibrating, which allows it to render the hardest materials into shreds. The plasti-alloy blade is available in a wide variety of shapes — including single or double blade — and thicknesses. Handling it requires strength and skill, but its greatest drawback is its conspicuousness.

Technical Specifications: The energy cartridge, which fits into the base of the shaft, guarantees full power for twenty-five hours. Like the vibro-sword, the vibro-axe uses standard energy cartridges, easily available throughout the Empire. Some models are rechargeable. A photonic accumulator allows it to be recharged when held under light, but the process takes two standard hours. Skill: *Melee combat*. Difficulty: Moderate (15). Damage: STR+13D (vibro-mode); STR+3D (unpowered).

Price: A good vibro-axe costs approximately 120 kublars.

Availability: Optimal, although ownership is regulated. Carrying one around urban populations would not be advisable, but in rural areas where it can pass as a tool, a vibro-axe hardly draws attention.

Reliability: The vibro-axe uses ancient technology, so it is thoroughly reliable. However, exposure to great amounts of moisture should be avoided.

Paralyzing Club

Thanks to the Prez's Hunchbacks, this seemingly obsolete weapon has returned to favor, because they missed that old "human touch." Aside from its effectiveness as a defensive club, just a slight touch is enough to administer a powerful electric shock. But that's not all: tapping it against the ground releases an electric shock that paralyzes all living things within a five-meter radius. Only the person holding the club is immune to its effect. This extremely effective attack provokes neuro-muscular paralysis for around five minutes, depending on the victim's constitution.

Technical Specifications: The paralyzing club, standard equipment of security forces on many worlds of the Empire, measures 105 centimeters and weighs 2,265 grams, including the energy cartridge. One standard cartridge provides power for seventy-five shocks. Skill: *Melee combat*. Difficulty: Easy (10). Damage: 5D+2 stun (paralyzing mode); STR+2D. Note: If the weapon is tapped on the ground, it does its damage to all targets within a five-meter radius, but then it must be recharged.

Price: The official price of the paralyzing club is forty-five kublars. It is easily found on the black market at a price ranging between 10 and 100 kublars.

Availability: Optimal. Although it is normally reserved for anti-riot troops, the paralyzing club appeals to many enthusiasts.

Reliability: As a traditional club, there is of course no possibility of breakdown. However, very humid environments can sometimes impede the function of its electric mode.

Electro-glove

The electro-glove is a huge metallic glove with fearsome effects in hand-to-hand combat, because it combines the devastating power of a traditional boxing glove with electrical damage. Upon contact, it administers an electric shock that maximizes the impact, often killing instantly depending upon the power of the blow. Alternatively, it can send an electric bolt as far as three meters, designed to stun the adversary for a few minutes.

Technical Specifications: The electro-glove comes in the shape of a traditional boxing glove, equipped with a large number of metallic reinforcements and a generator attached to the fist. Depending on its size, it can weigh somewhere between 465 and 598 grams, and it guarantees a powerful hit. Its kinetic force has broken many jaws. The energy cartridge contained in the generator provides enough power for fifty hits, or twenty-five electric bolts. Hand-to-hand use: Skill: *Melee combat*. Difficulty: Very Easy (5). Damage: STR+3D+2. Ranged use: Skill: *Firearms*. Fire Rate: 1. Range: 1/2/3/—. Damage: 4D+2 stun.

Price: An electro-glove's average price is 35 kublars.

Availability: Optimal. Since it can almost be considered recreational "sporting" equipment, the Electro-glove is accessible to anyone.

Reliability: Made of time-tested materials, the electro-glove is completely reliable.

Take a Peek in My Bag…

Manufactured in the Techno-Techno's laboratory-factories, the "hypnotic purse" is a little exclusive and costly wonder — 1265 kublars in authorized boutiques for the smallest sized model — which allows for the concealment of any element, living or inert, coming from the Universe's real dimension. Only the C.I.S. knows where the items slipped into the bag temporarily disappear to, but what is certain, is that they become absolutely invisible and undetectable. Extremely usefully for discretely and serenely passing borders or frontiers. This said, it is without a doubt optimistic to expect to get away with fooling a Techno-Technos surveillance system with such an item…

Bombs and Explosives

Today as always, explosives remain a major component of the art of war. Exploding ballistic charges are always used in combat, even in the interstellar void, where the impact is silent but just as deadly. In infantry battles on the ground, the front line is protected by explosive munitions, including rockets and grenades. Explosives might even be used strategically in covert action — sabotage, bomb-laying or political terrorism.

Numerous technological advancements have increased their effectiveness. New explosive material has been discovered, and increasingly sophisticated combinations have been developed, resulting in a tenfold increase in the detonating power of matter. Today, one OKO mini-bomb, no bigger than a thumbnail, has a destructive capacity equivalent to the paleo-Hiroshima bomb many times over. However, explosives are highly specialized commodities and strictly regulated by all the major organizations of the Empire. Although even the average and most easily obtainable explosives are of higher quality than in the past, the range of available products remains limited.

The two major types of explosives in use today leave a chemical signature indicating in which branch of the Empire they originated. Residue of Teflodynamite indicates origins within the Ekonomat or the Maganats, while traces of Polysemtex are an instant indicator of the Colonial Planets. As for the Church of the Industrial Saints, it has developed superpowerful explosives that it uses very rarely and only in the most absolute secrecy. The only exception is the OKO mini-bomb, which it donated to the Empire as a token of loyalty.

In the secrecy of its factory-labs, the C.I.S. concocts horrific bombs with devastating effects, like "negative mines," which look like harmless debris drifting through space but contain an anti-matter charge. Once they are set off by contact or by remote detonation, they release a certain quantity of anti-matter that instantly eradicates an equal quantity of matter. If a ship bumps against a mine, a hole appears in the hull without even the slightest explosion. Antipersonnel mines of the same type have also been manufactured. The C.I.S. also developed the "remora grip," made of genetic plastics that ensure permanent adhesion of a device to any surface. The plastic analyzes and recognizes the contact material, then melts into it by matching its symbiotic pulse rate at a chromosomal and atomic level. An OKO mini-bomb combined with a remora grip is invincible. To be on board a ship with an OKO-remora stuck to ione's self is to be in a very precarious position indeed.

Finally, the Church of the Industrial Saints is developing Tri-H-type bombs, in flagrant violation of the treaties signed between the Empire and the Colonial Planets. Some sources indicate they have started production and are stockpiling them in a highly secret location.

Game Characteristics

If you're playing the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* you can find game characteristics for common explosives on pages 233–234 of the rulebook.

Cybernetics

Although the scientific definition of cybernetics is relatively easy to understand, its role and place in the range of today's technologies is vague and underrated. The vast majority of current practices and innovations are credited exclusively to "technology" as the holy and all-powerful driving force behind the progress of intelligent races. Although there are definite types of uses for this endless source of wonders, public opinion looks down on cybernetics and its many offshoots — transplants, implants, nanotechnology, and bodily alterations — as being nowhere near as good as other advances.

While not yet seen as archaic, cybernetics is considered to be inferior — a fad, a potential solution, just one alternative in an infinite number of possibilities.

The Cybernetic Reality

Public Opinion

A quick glance is all you need to realize that, aside from the scientists and cyberjunkies who worship the implants as much as others do drugs, rare are those who see cybernetics as vital or even useful. The spread of pan-Techno-surgery and weapons has long reduced the advantages of cybernetic implants to being seen as mere fancy and even old hat. With the richest having access to health care and better equipment and the poorest preferring a large-caliber weapon to a microscopic chip, a skeptical public is pushing cybernetic applications out into the cold.

Although potential cybernetics customers are no more against the idea of a transplant than an internal implant or any other major bodily alteration, they are rare. The public generally prefers Techno-Techno technology, which is seen as and indeed is capable of transplanting, modifying, replacing, and improving any organ using a technology based on a combination of science, genetics, and mystical gnosticism. Many Techno-Techno operations are much like cybernetic applications, in the proper sense of the term, but the way in which they work and the energy used far surpass the realms of a simple "technique." There is just no comparison between an artificial heart transplant and a pre-birth programmed slow biological mutation of an embryo's natural heart.

The use of cybernetics is all the rarer, since the majority of the population sees no point in replacing a damaged limb. Add to this the prospect of being controlled or enduring the wrath of a Techno-Techno "requisition" and it is easy to understand why cybernetics is more amusing and entertaining than appealing. Virtually all cybernetic equipment can be remotely controlled by pirate remote controls easily bought on the black market. These range from basic transceivers through General Thato's hands to the most deadly of micro-bombs. It is understood that the Techno-Technos can also decide to suddenly control any cybernetic implant without either remote control or the slightest justification.

Getting Cybernetics

Cybernetics is as easily accessible as it is unwanted. The vast majority of the cybernetic products available are invented, designed, and ordered by the Techno-Technos and then produced by the Maganats. Rich families sometimes set up cybernetic production centers to design their own equipment, but the quality and scientific import of such "spontaneous" equipment very rarely equals the Techno-Technos' innovative and essential work. Three user profiles relate to the three main ways of accessing this technology's products: the Church of the Industrial Saints laboratories, the Maganat production centers, and backstreet surgeons, who may be pirates, rebels, or sponsored by other small independent groups. The numerous laboratories contract the transplant services and cybernetic products that they consider to be "official" in the same way as they rely on the Techno-Technos for the majority of their equipment, leisure, and health-care treatments. The rare output of new Maganat products, which even then are experimental, is exclusively reserved for society's elite, who are the only ones able to afford the prototypes and move in their inventors' social circles.

The "illegal" cybernetic technology produced and sold outside the pan-Techno networks offers a universal clientele an impressive catalogue of pirate cybernetics: modified Techno-Techno implants, banned chips, prohibited matrix programs, experimental nano-surgery and so on. Despite many suppliers and customers, prices and potential secondary effects are often highly unpredictable. No one knows anymore exactly how many fatal accidents have been caused by an equipment failure, unexpected pirating, or a Techno-Techno control with its often-final outcome.

Transplants, Implants, and Costs

The cost of implanting the body cybernetics making up most of the product catalogue is enough to reduce the

> ***Cybernetics and Technology***
>
> *Although technological advances have improved this science, cybernetics still stands alone. With pan-Techno-technology able to do everything, or nearly everything, it seems rather naïve to use cybernetics as a full-fledged science. The technology is still seen as an exception, as just another gadget in a world of endless options. You only have to look at the immense power of the Techno-Technos to combine the very essence of life with the product of technological progress to realize that they can do everything cybernetics can do, if they're not already doing it.*

clientele to the wealthy — or to common people driven to the back-street clinics for this type of conversion. If you want to get a cybernetic transplant, you have to have the right contacts and means to get into a C.I.S. clinic — every Endocity has at least one — or "alternative" operating theatre.

Equipment and transplant prices vary enormously depending on quality and size. For example, transplanting a minor peripheral replacement organ such as a finger costs less than 1,000 kublars and is pretty easy to get approved by the Church of the Industrial Saints censors. However, implanting a vital organ costs ten times this amount, if not more, and applications are only accepted from those with solid references and a high social status. The Techno-Technos have deliberately introduced this means-based selection in keeping with their principle that money is not nearly as important as where their know-how goes. This means that being able to afford cybernetics or any other pan-Techno science far from ensures that you get it.

Defusing

With the appearance of the new cybernetic options, defusing techniques have also been created to "soup up" official equipment with often-limited possibilities and radius, but also to break the essential link that the Techno-Technos have built with their creation. The possibility of being freed from the C.I.S.'s yoke is a real revolution. So it's not hard to figure out that the Techno-Technos are furiously fighting the pirates and major factions with the financial means and scientific knowledge to weaken and sometimes completely break the link between cybernetic equipment and the Techno-Technos. But bear in mind that even with the best technology, only Amourine and the power of the White Machines can, in the case of cybernetic and bio-cybernetic transplants and implants, set in motion a radical enough change to ensure true independence — as in the case of the defused Mentreks in particular.

Although the famous Hospital Planet has switched to a more "democratic" system by offering similar services at a reduced price, no one knows exactly how long the waiting list is for the consideration of applications — not to mention the actual operations. The two main alternatives are still the official centers and the back-street clinics, which cream off most of the customers. Moreover, it is understood that this is just one of the many Techno-Techno success stories of their control of the legal and illegal behind the facade of being swindled.

Game nformation

For guidelines on putting cybernetics into your *Metabarons Role-playing Game* character, along with game characteristics for some common implants, see pages 237–239 of the rule book.

Applications

Everyday Life

Cybernetics offers a wide range of "general public" applications ranging from simple holo-make-up to synthetic drug drips. They boast a multitude of implants and chips with as futile effects as changing clothes or eye and skin color, and suits thermally regulated to the wearer's microperspiration. These aesthetic applications are highly popular with the elite, who can afford the luxury and "good taste" of these caprices that they say make "all the difference between the plebes and the select few."

Need to Be Incognito?

The Holo-cosmetic microchip is a staple gadget with the Aristos. The chip allows one to completely cross dress achieving the actual appearance of somebody else. Inhabitants of the Gold Ring often use this method to descend incognito to amuse themselves in the soil and mire of the Red Ring. This said, if it hides the identity of those who wear it (placed behind the ears) from bio eyes, it doesn't escape the notice of the opto-electronic surveillance eyes. It is therefore ineffectual in certain surveyed sectors of the endocities, space highway stops, astroports, imperial installations, etc.

In addition to this aesthetics market, cybernetics offers all sorts of consumer chips, implants, transplants, and nano-services relating to medicine, staying in shape and drugs. Although the prohibitive price of the organic replacements is such that they are often reserved for the elite, the genetic improvement of certain ordinary organs — including the liver, eyes, skin, and nervous system — has become common practice. Healing, toxin absorbent, and antipoison patches circulate freely on the market, as do the many coveted drug injectors and drips that provide a regular or intermittent supply of psychotic, neurostimulating, and adrenal substances to massively improve reflexes and deaden the feeling of pain and fatigue — or simply keep withdrawal symptoms at bay.

There are also a number of cybernetics-related technological gadgets directly connected with the brain or the nervous system. These gadgets are used to access 3D city plans, archives, knowledge of a language, thermal and infra-red visual perceptions, and matrix network weapon, vehicle, piloting, and navigation interfaces.

Communication

Communication over short and long distances was long one of the main lines of cybernetic research and applications. However, with the appearance of new technologies, only a few highly specific implants still manage to

maintain their monopoly. Today, decades after the appearance of the first CybCom implants, the transplant and micro-chip catalogue is targeted mainly at head-hunters, private detectives, and other independents whose job is to stalk, spy, and access information — but who are deprived of high-tech equipment by their independent status and cruel lack of resources.

The old transceiver models generally implanted in the auditory canal have been replaced by more sophisticated systems transplanted into the cortical periphery. They use the synaptic system to encode and convey their wearer's mental frequencies. These communication mechanisms enable their users to translate a simple thought into a coherent message before sending it to a technological receiver such as a computer, drone, or loudspeaker. This Techno-Techno designed technology is still relatively expensive, but it is opening up new windows of opportunity for the Mentreks and is starting to appear in official spheres. However, some troublemakers suspect a massive mind-control operation.

These are the top-of-the-range implants. However, most of the independents use the more traditional, although microscopic, transmitter transplants and the array of mikes, sonars, radars, ultra- and infrasonic scanners, and neuro-emotional sensors that read emotions and moods virtually infallibly.

Weapons

Despite all these marvels of communication and biological improvement, the weapons market is still by far the most buoyant in terms of innovation, research, and advances. The parallel development of the defense industry and applied cybernetics since the invention of weapon interfaces has led to the appearance of deadly and accessible combinations on the market. Although only the Poly-Romanoffs and His Majesty the Tzar Iman Horlog, supreme ruler of the defense industry, can afford these new technologies, arms and associated cybernetic innovations are accessible to all. In the weapons trade, money is king.

The defense industry has added to its already-impressive arsenal of grenades, assault weapons, sonic effects, and combined and miniaturized weapons with the introduction of an option that is now used by all elite fighters: the weapons interface. The interface is like a matrix-connected implant. It gives wearers a connection with and control over their weapon or weapons that transforms them into real aiming and destroying machines by mentally calculating the trajectories, optimizing firing, and instinctively maneuvering with remarkable precision. These interface options are applied to combat armor and can also be used to instantly manage wounds, drug injections, and the movement and positioning of weapons systems — in fact, all the features that make the difference in combat.

Yet although the public is impressed by these technologies and the fighters make extensive use of them, the official commandos and armies of the leading factions have long since banned cybernetics from their armory. Wary of Techno-Techno interference, they use bio-options, combat drugs, and high-tech equipment, which cannot be interfered with or controlled and perform just as well if not better.

The Techno-Technos Are Watching You.

The Techno-Technos do not "control" the cybernetics market. They are its inventors, instigators, designers, and above all censors. In addition to helping create the majority of the cybernetic projects, ordering them from the Maganats or injecting new ideas, the Techno-Technos have nigh on absolute power over the applications created by this science. From the Techno-Centric (permanently linked to the Matrix network) to the Central Planet Serpents, (source of the C.I.S.'s knowledge and secrets), the Techno-Technos are so closely linked with the nature and essence of their technology that they have an unparalleled ability to control and influence all the spin-offs from their science.

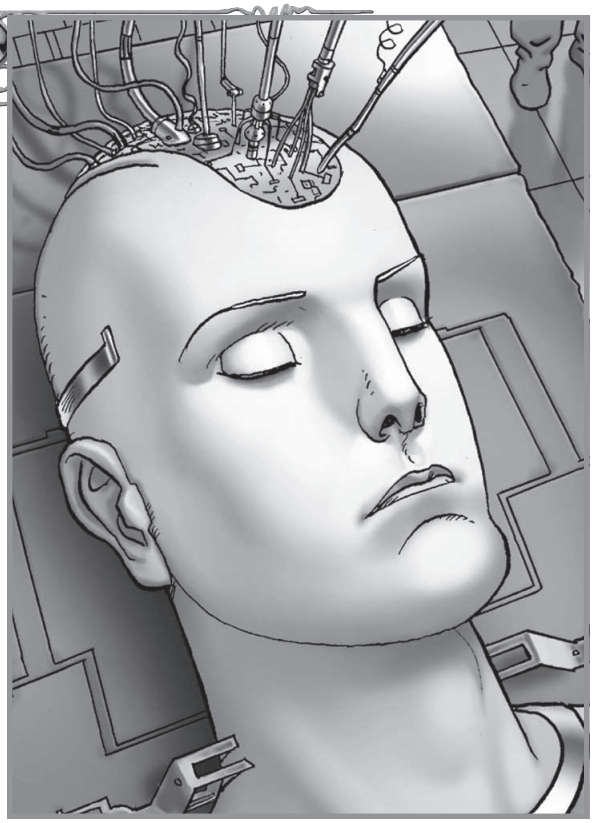
Taking control of a cybernetic hand to turn it against its owner is just the start of what they are capable of. The Techno-Technos can really act as they please and control any cybernetics application at will, not to mention any scientific application produced by their laboratories.

Information Technology and Matrix Networks

The Matrix Network

Although information technology has long been an everyday part of life, an overwhelming majority of the population uses computers and their immense capacities for humdrum logistical and operational tasks. Some are even unaware of the existence of the Netframes and the matrix network, commonly known as the "Matrix," which opens the doors of a virtual, algorithmic, and illusionary world to those who are really in the know. Although there is a whole cluster of local Netframes (the name for the information technology networks linking the different activity centers in each Endocity), these 3D holographic worlds harbor no confidential data sources and, as the pan-Techno-Techno Church censors smugly point out, are nothing more than "another amusement park."

In the Netframes, you can navigate, find software, data, and information technology subprograms in magical shapes and colors, and try to hack into the Matrix. However, none of the scintillating fortresses protects any real secret. Since these networks are primarily utilitarian, the Techno-Technos have gradually transformed them into new Necro-dream vectors by giving cybernauts the impression that they are



risking their lives and flying in the face of the law. They may contain guardians, fortresses, data banks, software and console contraband networks, penalties, and even anti-intrusion tracking units, but the reality of the matter is that this technology pirating is nothing more than a gigantic virtual masquerade.

In addition to this high-tech Necro-Dream vehicle, the Techno-Technos run another matrix, the Supreme Network, which keeps them in constant and instant contact with everything going on in the universe. This network extends to the outermost limits of space like a huge spider's web. It links every computer, technological, and living element, giving the Techno-Technos the power to track, probe, observe, influence, manipulate, and work real miracles.

The very existence of the Supreme Network must be one of the best-kept secrets there is. There is no connection whatsoever between this immaterial web and the local Netframes, and any hypothetical intrusion would be immediately punished by uncompromising destruction.

Although it is accessible from the War Star and Central Planet, the Supreme Network is exclusively reserved for the use of the pan-Techno-Techno Church.

Equipment

Information technology-applied cybernetics has two main categories of equipment: software and connection and navigation interfaces, used to optimize action and surfing on the local Endocity Netframes; and display and matrix manipulation implants, used by their wearers to penetrate the Netframes without a physical connection and use their mental influence to operate in the network.

Cybernetics also offers a wide range of tri-D glasses, optical and cortical implants, interfaces, cables, and console links to make the most of all the local Netframes' possibilities. Also available is a long list of software and applications associating pure information technology with environmental cybernetics — life support systems for long-term Matrix excursions, anti-intrusion alarms, central management units for local peripherals, sensitive interfaces, holographic keyboards, and so on.

Despite this wealth of equipment, only cybernauts with up-to-date neuro-cortical innovations can possibly optimize their network navigation and infiltration. These implants are grafted onto the cortex itself and use the neuronal and synaptic systems to transform the cybernauts' brains into a mind-boggling organic console during their excursions into the Netframes. Cybernauts hence control their movements and actions, see and react at the speed of thought — often increased tenfold by the implant, synthetic drugs, and other specially designed cybernetic implants. However, even with this ultra-sophisticated equipment, very few cybernauts are able to distinguish the real Network from the mundane local Netframes.

Robotics

An inevitable step in humanity's never-ending quest to attain godliness was that one day they would attempt to create life. And the attempt was successful — not only can they assemble mechanical devices that reproduce the physical aspects of humans in every way, but they can also breathe the spark of life into artificial intelligence that mimics the human psyche to the extent of suffering the same metaphysical anguish. And this is where the difficulty lies, for even a god can have his creation slip away from him.

Even back in Terra Prima's time, humans were eager to build machines that would perform their difficult and annoying tasks. Their efforts cannot be faulted, but complications arose when humanity's mastery over genetics allowed them to replicate life itself. This merging of life with machinery enabled the creation of brothers of humanity that resembled them in every way, but who were forced by circumstances into utter submission to humans, without possessing even the most basic rights. The boundaries between humans and their creations blurred, a massive wave of paranoid schizophrenia soon ensued, and half of humanity was wiped out. During this era, the Guild — which would later become the Church of the Industrial Saints — stumbled upon access to a new technology and a new reality. As a result, they campaigned actively against genetic experimentation, which, although not totally forbidden, remains under strict control to this day.

Currently, robots can be grouped into three major divisions. These divisions do not have specific names, because they are arbitrary classifications based on the functions robots perform within the Empire. In general, it should be remembered that although the C.I.S.'s intervention curbed the most significant excesses, there isn't anything to prevent the more powerful organizations — especially the Techno-Techno order — from doing anything they want.

Mechanical Servants and Domestic Robots

Today more than ever, humans take great pleasure in eliminating lowly chores from their daily routine. Even stooping down to pick something up is unnecessary — there is always a robot who will obediently perform the task, without even asking for thanks. Because of this, the powerful rulers of the universe, who dislike being in a position of owing anything to anybody, surround themselves with battalions of robots who prepare their food and administer to their every need without complaint. This domestic help comes in millions of forms. Some of them have a strikingly human appearance, but one element or another always indicates their robotic origin. Most of them are purchased for the home, and their costs vary according to their specialties and the options provided. The two most important criteria are overall quality and ease of interface. There is always room for improvement in this department because nothing is more important than having one's instructions understood. After all, who wouldn't have the urge to take a hammer to the mechanical smile of a robot that endlessly repeats, "Would you like some more?" after emptying a coffee pitcher onto the floor…

The mechanical servants of this first division are capable of fulfilling the function for which they are designed — and nothing more. They can neither display initiative nor interpret commands, and have only the ability to complete their task, today, tomorrow and ever after. Technological advances in this field give them the ability to complete ever more intricate and specific tasks, and also provide them with greater energy and lifespan, so long as they never give signs of approaching the human functions of interpretive analysis and initiative. This division includes not only the omnipresent servant robots, which today are barely even noticed, but also all the automatic devices that open and close doors, keep surveillance over entry points, carry out mechanical tasks, and so forth. These are normal robots, who by virtue of their programming cannot even contemplate experiencing any emotion, and therefore pose no risk of transgression, short circuit or excessive zeal.

House Lizard?

Provided with the most up to date bio-mechanic interactive matter, Gorinex's latest model will be the delight of even the most demanding households. With its proto-human interface — able to imitate the growling husband, the grumpy mother-in-law and the whining child — it cheerfully replaces the entire family. Functions? Capabilities? The list is long. Not only does it slice, dice, dismember, transfuse, and knead, but it also pulverizes, laminates, crushes, eviscerates, and incinerates absolutely all and any living elements. Sold today at a promotional price of only 23 kublars, it is the perfect gift. (The absolutely necessary security unit is sold separately for the modest sum of 3650 kublars.)

Sample Robots

If you play the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* you can find examples of serval types of mechanical servants and domestics robots on pages 239–240 of the rule book.

Metabaronic and Maxi-protonic Robots

This second division includes only the robots on the Metabaron's staff. Their ringleader is Tonto, a defective model who only requires the slightest provocation to reveal a rebellious streak that would make the C.I.S. want to eradicate him. In fact, he was originally consigned to the scrap-heap by

the Techno-Techno Standards Commission, in order to prevent him from violating all the laws of robotics. The Metabaron found him there and saved him. Since then, he has been the little spoiled god of the Metabunker, ruling not only over the domestic life of his Master, but the fate of his soul as well. The strange relationship between Tonto and the Metabaron is a perfect example of just how much devotion a robot can display. Tonto clearly represents the type of deviant artificial intelligence that the C.I.S. would eliminate instantly if they had the chance. To alleviate his long spells of boredom, Tonto created Lothar, a kind of mechanical offspring who he purposely endowed with curiosity and intelligence, so he could indulge his own sadism by never giving him answers and always keeping him guessing.

The Metabaron continues to construct robots as the need arises, and so he now boasts a massive line-up of maxi-protonic models with an amazing array of deadly functions. Strictly speaking, they are not endowed with intelligence, but they do possess a certain amount of autonomy, coupled with a strong sense of independent action. When fighting the Metabaron, they analyze, make feints, lay traps, predict his actions, and take countermeasures, along with a number of other activities that would normally be impossible for their binary counterparts to perform. Finally, harnessing his abilities to their fullest, the Metabaron has forged a connection so elevated with all these systems that it is almost a telepathic psychic link. In an instant, as if there were a physical connection, he can take control and substitute his will for any of the programs. Nobody knows just how far this capability extends, not even he.

For obvious reasons, nobody in the universe, no matter how rich or powerful, can acquire a maxi-protonic or Metabaronic robot. These mechanical beings belong only to their Master, now and forever. It would be madness to even consider stealing one, because in less time than it would take to blink an eye, the Metabaron would recover it and impose a tremendous penalty.

His Father Is His Mother…

Because he alone gave birth to his son after having been self-fertilized, Aghora, No-Name's father-mother, has achieved in his own way the ideal of the Perfect Androgyne, so dear to the Empire's grand castes. However, this fact of nature has nothing to do with divine intervention, but simply and surely due to a surgical intervention technique to which Tonto is no stranger. This may also explain the scarring on Aghora's forehead, as well as his double character, which is as deeply masculine as it is feminine.

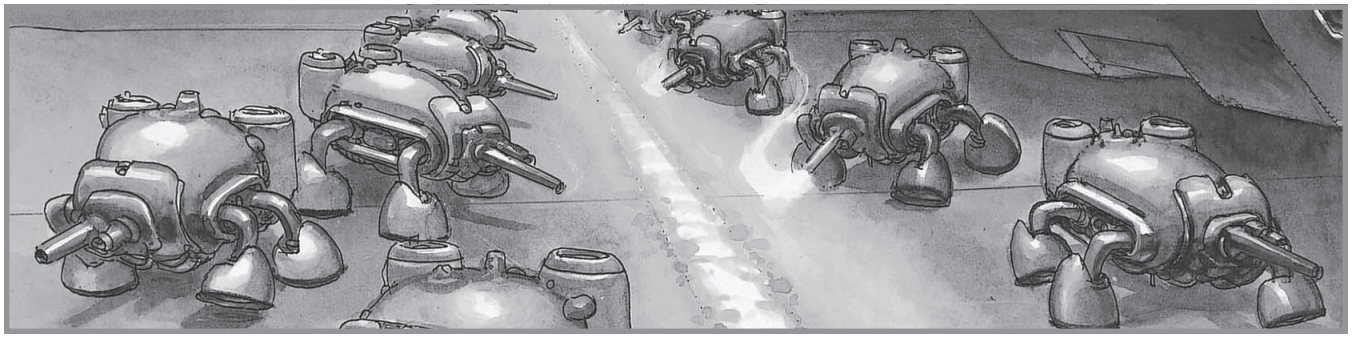
Sample Robots

If you play the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* you can use the game characterisitcs of mechanical servants and domestics robots on pages 239–240 of the rule book for a base, adding whatever additional abilities you feel are appropriate for the duties required of a particular Metabaronic robot.

Techno-Techno Kill-Guardians and the Necrobot

The third division of robots consists of all the machines and devices developed and controlled by the C.I.S. In great numbers, they climb and snake behind the walls of the Endocities, burrowing through its corridors and ventilation hatches. Among them are cybo-cops, eye-cops, and all the other discreet but omnipresent surveillance and enforcement devices that turn the cities into private hunting-grounds for the C.I.S. In flagrant violation of the rules they themselves helped to establish, the Techno-Technos endow each one with great intellectual capacity and a faculty of reasoning so developed it is even capable of engendering a quest for spiritual awareness. They require a certain amount of free will in order to act and react, to perceive, judge and execute. To counter the inevitable risk of loss of control, and protect the most sacred taboo of a creation turning against its creator, the C.I.S. implants an auto-destruct system inside each robot that is triggered by the slightest indication of emotion. This group of robots already presents a high risk because they act against humans; emotion is the sign of burgeoning intelligence, and therefore cannot be tolerated.

These are not the only violations committed by the C.I.S. Not content to merely animate metallic coldness with a glimmer of conscience, they have also put ample resources toward an even greater abomination. They have harnessed the primary source of life inside genes and chromosomes, and then twisted and perverted it, with the result that some essentially robotic machines bear characteristics normally associated with the plant or animal kingdoms.



At the Ophidiat's whim, the trait of aggression was injected into the kill-guardians, its assassin-robots. Although their purpose is to serve their master, they are also capable of acting on their own. Such is the case of the necrobot, a perfectly dehumanized total atrocity. In cases when an endocity is completely swept by riots, the Prez, under direct orders of the Emperoress, will clone himself into a machine of death. This ultimate manifestation of inhuman power then sets off on an unstoppable descent down through the levels of the city, annihilating all forms of life it encounters. This brutal machine might have a human-like superior intelligence, but it can only perform two functions: detect life and destroy it.

Aside from its deadly reflexes and faculties of strategic analysis, the Necrobot is equipped with metamorphic abilities which allow it to alter itself continually in order to maximize its power of destruction. Whether in the form of a lethal ball or long steel serpent, it deals out death from the Golden Ring down to the Acid Lake, into which it finally immerses itself and dissolves, its massacre at an end.

Another creature born from a mix of diabolic technology and perverted genes is the Techno-Scarab, which guards the holy Techno-Temple on the Central Planet. However, unbeknownst to the Ophidiat, all the genetic tampering performed by the Techno-Technos carries the seed of their downfall. By dipping into the Tenebrae to impart immaterial force to material substances, they unknowingly bestow all their creations with a double nature. For the fluid of the Tenebrae is infected with a "virus of light."

The Space Behind the Eyes

A high-tech system whose relatively high price (a good thousand kublars) reflects its level of sophistication. The galactic eye is a completely autonomous microsonde that moves through the interstellar void by small, ultra rapid quantum leaps. Space vessels can launch reconnaissance missions in every direction thanks to this system, including the hyperspace exit points. Its miniscule size, unique method of movement, and its instantaneous and permanent connection make it a precious tool for thwarting potential traps, in a perimeter that extends out over two days of hyper spatial voyage.

Cybo-cops

Mechanical combat androids, cybo-cops (also known as cybercops and robocops) make up shock squads that endocity authorities use to conduct missions requiring a bit of diplomacy. Although one may believe that the Hunchbacks and Endoguards being of human origin would have some skill and tact in this area, they end up behaving too coarsely. Better to call in the cybo-cops who are craftier and smoother, but prove themselves to be just as effective when necessary.

Technical Specifications

Modeled after ancient athletes, the cybo-cops have the look and stature of an admirably well-proportioned man. Having a standard height of 186 centimeters, they weigh an impressive 256 kilos, not including weapons. Without the help of epiphyte, their movement would be severely affected. This seemingly strange density is due to the impressive range of technical panoply concentrated in their bodies. In fact, besides a fusion reactor that uses enriched netranekkon, which also works as a self-destruction system, the cybo-cops dispose of equipment that would make many a space adventurer envious. Every sort of blunt and cutting instruments ever conceived by man can be found hidden in their limbs, as well as loads of weapons and devices having diverse functions.

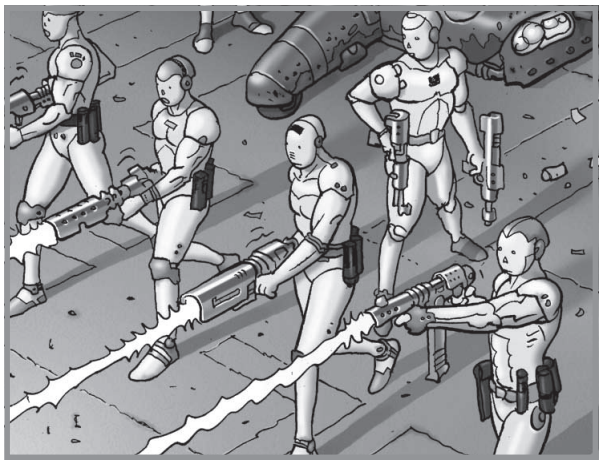
In addition, the thick protective layer of silver netranekkon which covers their precious circuitry and greatly contributes to their weight, can take a beating without so much as a flinch from several hundreds of the most commonly used heavy weaponry.

Undoubtedly because the C.I.S. didn't deem it necessary, the cybo-cops are not equipped with an anti-g device. Their biped movement is by no means impressive, for they barely reach fifty kilometers per hour at their peak. However, they can count on their stamina in every situation.

Due to the type of police missions that are assigned to them, the cybo-cops are of course also endowed with a Fantax diode, enhanced with an impressive analytical memory. Not only must they understand and duplicate bio behavior, but they also need to have the capacity to compare data and facts and draw conclusions…

Missions

Like any other endocity troop, the cybo-cops operate as a crackdown unit, quelling repression, but what makes them unique is that they are equally given investigations, which are exclusive to them. This explains why the Fantax diode acts as the spinal column or the basis of their true nature. It is also the reason why at times the cybo-cops' behavior is so surprising. For example, while nothing distinguishes one cybo-cop from another, they have insignia



that nobody understands but makes one think that there exist thousands of ranks. Likewise, the weapons they carry vary according to their mood. If their soul is feeling every so slightly poetic, they will favor the quaint laser rifle. But if they are overcome with melancholy, they'll do their talking with a solid Integrated 1K8 gun in hand.

Due to the range of their activities and teeming "creativity," the cybo-cops are under the strict surveillance of the Central Brain. At times, for the well running and balance of an endocity, one or a few cybo-cops are required to act in secrecy and with extreme discretion…. This tight control is explained by the fact that they stock countless quantities of secrets in their electronic memories, which constitutes a powerful temptation for small groups and other troublemakers. Exploring a cybo-cop's head is the occasion to immediately be informed of all of the endocity's security measures and workings. It is said, moreover, that commandos wouldn't hesitate to attack isolated cybo-cops to seize their precious quartz neurons.

Sample Cybo-cops

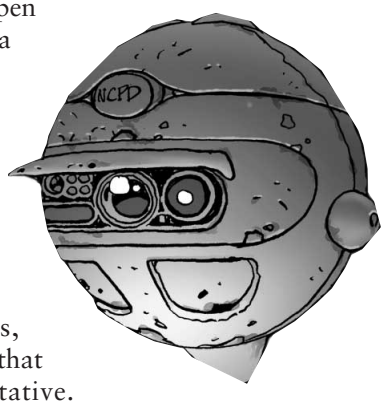
If you play the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game,* you can find game characteristics for cybo-cops on pages 14–15 of *Guidebook #1 to Path of the Warrior.*

Eye-cops

Whether they patrol alone or in teams, eye-cops are a fantastic means of power for the authority that controls and activates them, for they ensure a veritable omnipresence in every nook and cranny that they are able to reach. In the endocities, they work on behalf of the C.I.S., through the intermediary of the Supra-computer, the Central Brain for which they are the eyes and ears.

Technical Specifications

Eye-cops are metalloid spheres having a diameter of between 4.52 centimeters for the smallest and 19.54 centimeters for the largest. This difference in size in no way modifies their qualities and characteristics, it simply allows for greater or smaller discretion, depending upon the needs of the mission. On their exterior surface, composed of silver netranekkon, three distinct elements stand out. First of all, and largest in size, is the camera. Circular in appearance, it constitutes a pre-eminent sphere with countless facets. It is in fact a black crystal prism, which assures 360-degree vision. This camera is permanently linked to Police Central and the Central Brain, via a connection in the absolutely interference free super-frequencies. Immediately beneath the camera's black eye appears a small hole placed at the summit of a tiny pyramid. It's the barrel through which shoot out the awesome and energetic shots that each eye-cop is able to fire. Its plasma shots fly a distance of up to two hundred meters with diabolic precision. In terms of fire power, a eye-cop is at least as formidable as a good old cogan 45…. Finally, it has a type of membrane about the size of a kublar coin, covered by wire mesh. It's the vocal interface through which the eye-cop can, if it chooses, shriek orders — up to 185 decibels in open air — or carry on a conversation.



The eye-cop's interior is every bit as sophisticated as its exterior. For these particularly advanced robotic specimens are highly autonomous, and possess a mind that is readily argumentative. The C.I.S. endowed them with a Fantax diode, no doubt to guarantee results on the spying front. Strictly speaking it is not a conventional artificial intelligence program, but rather a routine of behavior emulating the whimsical and unpredictable, qualities so dear to humans. It is therefore not so rare to meet up with a eye-cop who is plunged into an animated conversation with somebody (while all the time keeping a watchful eye out on the surroundings, of course). Certain humans even have the conviction that a eye-cop can be sweet talked….

To supply these devices with the power they need, each eye-cop has a veritable micro-nuclear plant integrated into its system, using enriched netrankekkon fusion, coupled with an epiphyte diffuser. The eye-cops thus have the advantage of using anti-gravitational movement to travel at absolutely staggering speeds. Advancing in a straight line, along the major arteries and upper-level rings, they easily break the sound barrier, and would reach Mach III or IV given enough open space.

The enriched energy charge they contain equally serves as an autodestruction system. This function is extremely useful for remote-control bombs. But this is not the only objective, for a necro-program also oversees the operation and functioning of the Fantax diodes. In case of excessive overheating, a self-termination order is immediately given to the dysfunctional eye-cop. According to certain sources, it seems that on the black market one can find models of defective eye-cops that have refused to autodestruct.

Missions

Surveillance instruments par excellence, the eye-cops haunt all levels of the endocities by the millions. But they are not only found in the city shafts, of course. Authorities of a good many worlds have recourse to these instruments for the control of their cities, as well as for more confidential missions like espionage and infiltration. In fact, their great versatility allows them to be highly efficient in all sorts of circumstances. Everything is therefore a question of the right dosage of autonomy and judicious use of the Fantax diode.

In the Endocities, the eye-cops are assigned to follow would-be detectives. This assignment serves a double purpose: to keep an eye on the aspiring detective and his activities, as well as to confirm the successful conclusion of the "investigation test" assigned to the postulant.

Transportation

In an intergalactic domain as vast as the Human Empire, the issue of transportation and shipping is clearly of major importance. The renowned Techno-Tunnels — famous interstellar tunnels opened by the Church of the Industrial Saints — offer a practical way to cross vast interstellar distances, thereby forging links between galaxies so distant that not even their dimmest light can be seen. Even then, they only link 22,000 of the thousands of millions of worlds that exist within the universe. One might travel millions of light-years in an instant, but then face a journey of millions of parsecs before reaching one's destination.

Transportation

Hyperspace routes are the only feasible option for this type of local travel, if it can so be called. Ever since the light barrier was broken, this form of travel became completely safe and reliable. All routes have been methodically explored and mapped out, to prevent travelers from encountering nasty natural surprises (like asteroid fields or black holes) until exiting. Although hyperspace itself is completely safe, unpleasant shocks can occur when emerging from it. There is no risk of collision, because the exit points are carefully positioned in areas far removed from major stellar trade routes, but rather from a pirate welcoming committee! Near strategically important systems or worlds that belong to some particular group, frequent patrols protect travelers from this kind of unwelcome incident. But on the more isolated routes, the only measure that will decrease the high risk is adjusting the exit coordinates. In normal cases, space cartographers have allowed enough of a margin to permit this type of departure — there should be no asteroid fields within two light-years of an exit point. However, it is always better not to play with fire.

After these escapades in outer space comes the time for displacement through the atmosphere. The introduction of epyphite to the Empire has greatly improved things in this field. True, vehicles with a hovering capacity existed a long time before, but the enormous engine required to create an acceptable level of convenience kept the configurations somewhat limited — no sporty two-seaters or even any eighteen-seater limo-crafts! Today, a swanky two-seater will take less than two minutes to reach the stratosphere, and can be drifting through space a minute later. The return trip is just as quick: once the atmospheric barrier has been breached, a ship can avoid all the convoluted approach maneuvers of the past and simply head down at full speed, lightly tapping the brakes at ten meters above the ground. The epyphite — a true miracle of nature — absorbs everything, g-forces and hull deformations alike.

On the ground run wheeled vehicles, driven by Troglosocialiks or nostalgic enthusiasts of the paleo-past. A hydrogen battery has replaced the horrible combustion motor that provides propulsion and traction, but the rest is traditional: axles, shock absorbers, wheels, tires, steering, transmission, and so forth. Although these vehicles are light-years ahead of even Terra Prima's most advanced models, such as the Buick Centurion, they are still far from the best. Much better is available: everything from gliding vehicles, one or two-seater scooters that can fly at 500 kilometers an hour ten feet above the ground, to massive super-comfortable mega-convoys for public transportation that can travel 2,000 kilometers to another city in less than half an hour. Epyphite has truly introduced wonders to the universe!

Such possibilities can only inspire the creativity of the inventors. Every world, depending on its financial assets and the disposition of its leaders, has created its own transportation system for the ground, the atmosphere, and outside the atmosphere. Making a comprehensive list of all vehicles produced in the Empire would be a task not even three Mentreks could accomplish with all eternity at their disposal. Nonetheless, the following is a short sample of human ingenuity that might be encountered on a journey through space.

Guild of Imperial Merchants Cargo Dreadnaught

A colossal space behemoth designed for commercial use, the Guild's cargo ship is a heavy vessel whose harmless appearance should not fool an eager pirate. Like many Techno-Techno creations, it hides dark secrets on the interior, much worse than could be imagined. It's no coincidence that these ships are the ones selected to carve their way through space, ferrying the treasures and beauty of the universe back to the bosom of the C.I.S. It is jampacked from bow to stern with technological features that make it either a fierce predator or an unassailable fortress. Aside from its weapons and the 5,000 Techno-technicians who run the ship, it also carries 1,000 Techno-assassins whose reputation for murder and mayhem is truly well-deserved.

Technical Specifications

The ship is approximately 1,500 meters long and sacrifices elegance for an imposing bulk. Due to its primary function, it has huge holds for its precious cargo. The five lower decks, all pressurized, are devoted to freight storage, while an interdeck area is devoted to holding space fighters. The five upper decks are for the passengers and crew. The Techno-Techno troops live in very basic quarters. The ship's officers, all higher-ranking functionaries in the Techno-Techno order, enjoy more formal quarters and a mess hall.

Speed and Propulsion

A huge propulsion chamber runs through the length of the whole ship, from the bow to the rear tubes. Thanks to

the C.I.S.'s secret technology, it can deliver rather impressive performances. It can go from a cruising speed of 50,000 kilometers per hour to above light speed at 1,080,000,000 kilometers per hour in 36.3 seconds. Overcoming the inertia of a ship of that size requires an absolute mastery of epyphite.

Crew

The ship holds 6,000 people. They handle navigation and maintenance as well as seeing to the security of the ship and carrying out operations in atmosphere.

Armaments

-Firing posts: 20 flak cannons and 10 laser cannons.

-Shields: There is an entire range of positronic screens, protective shields, supraradars, and electro-spies.

-Armor: The white netranekkon hull includes reinforcements that no known technique can breach.

-Capacity: The Guild's cargo-vessel can hold approximately 200,000 tons — or 566,000 cubic meters — which allows it to transport a large and very precious cargo.

Game Characteristics

Game characteristics for this ship can be found on pages 251–252 of the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* rule book.

The Pirate Ostrov-Class Mini-Fighter

The ultimate multi-purpose vessel, the Ostrov-Class Mini-Fighter has such a frightening level of firepower that it makes its other performance characteristics look weak. Highly maneuverable and capable of astonishingly quick acceleration, it is the ideal vessel for sudden ambushes, and therefore much-cherished by pirates. They were designed by a Mentrek in the Maganat of the Poly-Romanoffs, whose name they bear. They were originally conceived for close defense of a planet. Grouped around large asteroids, they would swarm upon any heavy vessel that penetrated the more distant lines of defense. This tactic was efficient and highly deadly. After being used a number of times, it became clear that the ship would be very effective as an attacking vessel.

Technical Specifications

Twenty meters long and thirty-five meters wide, the Ostrov-Class mini-fighter has nothing in common with a cruise ship or pleasure vessel. Its design is totally efficient and austere. Three enormous central boosters give it phenomenal acceleration, which can produce spectacular results inside the ship, since only the seat of the pilot, co-pilot, navigator, and gunners are treated with epyphite. Anyone aboard one of these ships is strongly advised to stick to their seat when the pilot turns on the juice. The three engine blocks are equally spaced along the center and the wings, and can be used either together or separately in order to execute acrobatic maneuvers such as spinning dives, twirls, and spirals like a falling leaf. Aside from the cockpit and the four gunners' posts, the interior is completely bare.

Speed and Propulsion

This ship's reputation as the dragster of the universe is based solely on its acceleration. Nonetheless, despite its jack-rabbit starts, the acceleration drops off after that, so it takes 43.7 seconds to go from cruising speed to above light speed, which is not exceptional for such a small vehicle.

Crew

There are seven men aboard, four gunners and three to fly the ship.

Armaments

-Firing posts: 1 laser array and 3 heavy cannon turrets.

- Shields: Shields are unnecessary on an attack vessel that depends on its speed.

-Armor: The high-quality alloyed hull is strong enough to resist the first few salvoes.

-Capacity: A mere two-ton capacity gives the Ostrov-class Mini-Fighter just enough room to hold its ammunition.

Game Characteristics

Game characteristics for this ship can be found on page 257 of the *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* rule book.

Speed at Top Speed!

As everybody knows, the supraluminumic speed barrier has been broken… This fact no longer impresses anybody but troglosocialik archeo- baboons. Talk to me about chromosomic speed, that's a bit better. It brought much to our beloved Empire. But here comes the legendary mental V-Quartzz, that which carries you at the speed of thought. Yahoo!! It'll knock your socks off! But apparently there's even better still. The Shabda-Oud witches' famous Pradex punctual-chrono-G. It rips through time itself, leaving it behind. You're there before you've even started to go….

Techno-Destroyer

The Techno-Destroyer not only belongs in the family of gigantic spacecraft, but it expands the very definition of the term. It contains a tremendous amount of carrying capacity, but instead of transporting goods or merchandise, it carries weapons and space-fighters. The crew's quarters are above the technical spaces of navigation and control, occupying the top hundred decks. A massive chamber, 125 meters high, runs through the middle of the ship and offers an unsurpassable view of the interstellar void.

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Speed and Propulsion

Although this ship's method of propulsion is shrouded in the greatest secrecy by the C.I.S., the frankly astonishing performances it demonstrates give it great public notoriety. A Techno-Destroyer can go from cruising speed to hyperlight speed in 18.2 seconds. Clearly, the powers of epyphite as well as many other marvels make a significant contribution to these achievements.

Crew

On board are 20,000 people, including 10,000 Techno-assassins and 5,000 Techno-technicians who carry out experimental tasks in the ship-board laboratories.

Armament

-Firing posts: Visible on outside: 50 heavy cannons (crew: 5 each; skill: *gunnery,* fire control: 2D, space range: 3-20/40/80; atmosphere: 6-40/80/160 km; damage: 6D), 50 flak cannons (crew: 3 each; scale: fighter; skill: *gunnery,* fire control: 2D, space range: 1-10/15/30; atmosphere: 300-500 m/1 km/2 km; damage: 5D+2), and 50 laser cannons (crew: 4 each; skill: *gunnery,* fire control: 2D, 3-20/40/80; atmosphere: 6-40/80/160 km; damage: 4D).

-Shields: Positronic screens, protective shields, supra-radars and electro-spies. (Shields: 6D; sesnors: 200/5D.)

-Armor: The hull seems to be made of white netranekkon. (Hull: 11D.)

-Capacity: Estimated to be 500,000 tons.

-Maneuverabilty: 1D. Crew skill: *astro-nav* 5D, *comm* 5D, *gunnery* 5D, *piloting* 6D, *sensors* 5D, *shields* 5D, *command* 6D.

Endoguard Troop Transport Ship

This medium-sized hybrid vessel is the ship that peace-loving people of the Empire most fear to see darken their skies. The shadow that its massive silhouette casts over them is the specter of death itself. Despite its rather mundane appearance, this military ship is a harbinger of devastation.

Technical Specifications

This is an atmospheric transport ship, but it is also capable of traveling into outer space, for example, to join a heavier vessel in orbit. As the transport of the mightiest force in the Empire, it includes all the latest technology. It is also well-endowed with epyphite, and can perform maneuvers near ground level that make a complete mockery of gravity. Due to its military function, the interior of the vehicle is relatively bare, without cabins or any forms of comfort.

It contains three separate compartments: the cockpit, a cabin for the Endoguard, and the hold. When in space, all three are pressurized. It is shaped like a parallelogram, measuring seventy-eight meters long and thirty-six meters wide, and weighs 89,658 tons when empty. Each Endoguard Troop Transport Ship also has an entirely automated support vehicle at its disposal which follows at a distance. It is an identical ship, containing enough spare parts to build at least three other transports.

Speed and Propulsion

Fitted with a superevolved hydrogen motor, the Endoguard Troop Transport Ship can reach a speed of 2256 kilometers per hour just one meter above the ground. In space, it could theoretically reach light speed, but that is not the main purpose for which it was designed.

Crew

One hundred pepole are aboard. Two pilot and navigate the ship, two operate the guns, leaving the remaining ninety-six available for deployment.

Armament

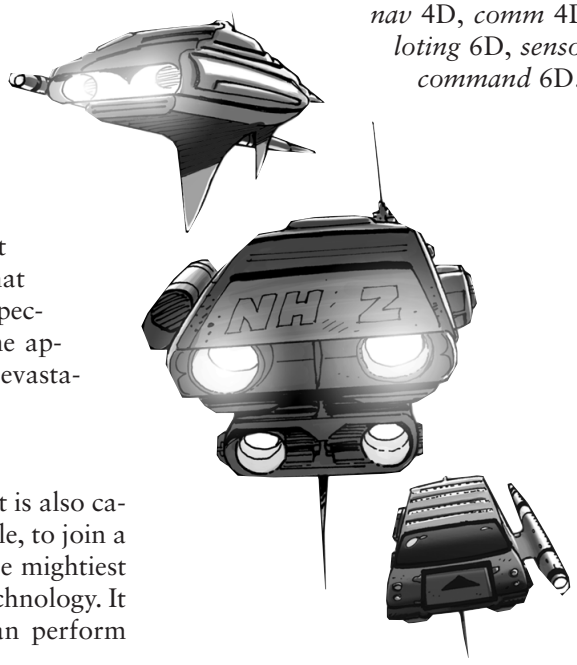
-Firing posts: 1 heavy turret-mounted multi-cogan (crew: 1; skill: *gunnery,* fire control: 1D, space range: 1-2/10/20; atmosphere: 100-200 m/1 km/2 km; damage: 6D+2).

-Shields: 1 maxi-protonic screen. (Shields: 3D+2.)

-Armor: White netranekkon plates on the outer structure. (Hull: 5D.)

-Capacity: 100 tons.

-Maneuverabilty: 2D. Crew skill: *astro-nav* 4D, *comm* 4D+2, *gunnery* 6D, *piloting* 6D, *sensors* 5D, *shields* 5D+1, *command* 6D.



The Metabunker

The unchanging heart of the Metabaron, the Metabunker is an inviolable fortress, holy sanctuary of the Clan of Castaka and repository of their many secrets, occupied by the eternally frenzied activity of the robots Lothar and Tonto, the only two beings that the Metabaron considers his friends. But the Metabunker is much more than that… It is a lair forever empty, a place of tragic solitude through which its master's footsteps will never again echo… although his presence remains everywhere.

A Quick Overview

It was built in the year 29900 by Othon, with his considerable architectural talents and the help of Honorata and Tonto. It is the ultimate machine of war, representing a true synthesis of the ancient warrior ways of the Clan of Castaka, with the new destructive and creative talents held by the Metabaron as guardian of the universe. In that time, the Metabunker was a symbol of power and proud solitude, designed to serve not only as the final base for the persecuted clan, but also as a platform of reconquest from which a deadly force would spring forth to annihilate their enemies.

This citadel, equipped with cold and beautiful technological refinements, also contains terrifying weapons and powers so genuinely horrifying that their mere mention would freeze the blood of even the most-hardened combatants. Of course, everything in the realm of human and non-human technology is in its onboard armory, but there are other surprises in store for any attacker whose excessive optimism or unbridled arrogance would lead him to defy the forbidding stronghold. First, he would have to face one of the formidable bio-electrograms generated by the Metabaron's solidification program. These manifestations of the warrior of warriors are just as taciturn as he is, and share the idea of efficiency carried to its highest degree, since they are only granted three minutes, five and seven-hundredths seconds in which to emerge victorious, and they have never yet failed. Even when it is perfectly at rest and the Metabaron is absent, the Metabunker is a tough nut at the center of the universe, hard to crack. Nothing can penetrate its defenses or destroy it. Only its creator or one of his manifestations could damage it, but fortunately, that does not occur very often.

The Essence of Epiphyte

Endowed with an impenetrable armature and reinforcement, equipped with the most powerful weapons of any space armada, rich with powers uniting the best of technology with the essence of Gangez, the Metabunker defies the laws of gravity and physics. Heavier than the most crushing of major planets, it slips through the stellar void at the speed of fundamental particles and with a single leap crosses the frontiers of worlds and dimensions. Its singular nature, intimately linked to the powers of epiphyte, makes this uncommon construction a veritable paradox, a tangible incarnation of the gravity principle. Many see in the Metabunker a second universe door, symbol of Mardador's duality, the weight of the worlds and the lightness of infinity, but no one would dare wonder what type of reality can really guard over this free flowing portal.

The Exterior

The Metabunker is large and completely immaculate, with the pure and perfectly-faceted appearance of a diamond. This similarity to an ancient mineral is not entirely coincidental. The Metabunker's facets might not quite feature the same impeccable regularity as this gem, but then again their respective functions are not quite identical either. Gems are prisms; they capture light, sending it back out again in many directions through refraction, enlivening and magnifying it. The Metabunker is like a black hole that absorbs all forms of energy without exception, acting as a point of convergence for all the energy in the universe.

However, it does share with diamonds their absolute hardness and insurmountable solidity. Its well-planned shape serves another specific purpose. When any impact or direct attack comes its way, it does not match it with equal resistance, but instead protects itself by maintaining a state of perpetual deflection. Every single facet presents a deceptive and off-set angle that wards any blow off into infinity. Even if the Metabunker were to crash against a planet, regardless of relative mass and speed, it is the planet that would certainly burst into smithereens.

However, the fact that it uses such devices of deception does not mean that the Metabunker is weak in the slightest. Just the opposite: its strength and peerless solidity make it a unique and unassailable stronghold that will never be breached.

Structure

The Metabunker was built according to the principles of psychomodular architecture. It follows the patterns of dreams that come between wakefulness and sleep, where the most outlandish images with no discernible meaning string themselves together with apparent logic. In other words, it is a vast whole of small interlocking pieces brought together by some incomprehensible geometric pattern, but its final cohesion is perfect and indestructible. This conglomeration of facets is assembled over a substructure that makes white netranekkon seem as flimsy as paper. This internal structure is not only solid, but can also

stretch like a spinal cord, serving as the base for the complicated whole that gives the Metabunker its status as the absolute fortress of the universe.

Defenses

In strict military terms, the Metabunker presents a battery of all kinds of defenses of a range and efficiency unmatched to this day, and which will probably go unmatched for a long time to come. In the field of detection and warning, it utilizes maxi-protonic sensors whose range can surpass by an order of several hundred even the highest-performance models produced by the Church of the Industrial Saints. For this reason, even daring to dream of taking the Metabunker by surprise is totally inconceivable. Furthermore, in the highly-unlikely event that some headstrong fool would attempt to do so, he would still have many lines of defense to penetrate: multi-positronic shields, infraprotonic barricades, and the meta-armored hull plating. And all of that is nothing when compared to the energy sphere which surrounds the ship with a bluish halo, keeping it safely nestled at the heart of an impenetrable protective core.

The energy nourishing the ship and its defenses springs directly from the universe guarded by Gangez. This inexhaustible mystic source has such an impact on the material world that humankind would be driven to the brink of absolute terror if they knew of it. Only another such power, another custodian of a different universe, would dare to challenge the Metabunker. But even so, he would still have to face the Metabaron's warrior spirit, infusing the fortress down to its smallest particle and breathing into it an implacable will to win. This suppressed and unstable explosive fury that wishes only to be expressed forms the deepest philosophical core of the mighty ship. The force becomes apparent when we see the "Porcupine Defense" in action, which thrusts out hundreds of millions of heavy weapons through every interstice, ready to spit their deadly and fiery tongues. Its firepower is capable of obliterating absolutely all creatures and things in the universe. Finally, if it ever did face a truly insurmountable adversary, the Metabunker — in an act worthy of its master — would not hesitate to self-destruct, taking the universe with it if necessary, to wipe reality clean of such an abomination.

Propulsion

To move a structure of such dimensions requires colossal energy, especially since it was constructed in the atmosphere of Planet Perdita, whose gravity at ground level is absolutely phenomenal — more than a thousand times greater than Terra Prima's. No known vessel in the universe can escape the clutches of such a powerful force. The Metabunker, however, by drawing its power directly from the central energy source of the whole universe, can generate a force even greater than a black hole — with the difference that it is not a fixed point in the cosmos. When it begins to move, its power and acceleration are in the same order as the forces present at the beginning of the universe at the Big Bang plus one micro-nanosecond.

Inside the Metabunker, each of the compartments is also equipped with its own independent propulsion system. On a much smaller scale, this allows it to maintain cohesion with its adjacent sections and to counteract opposing forces and structural deformities that might affect the structure's equilibrium. The essential characteristic of the Metabunker is that its multitude of parts form a unique and complete whole.

White Netranekkon

This Techno-Techno alloy is made using an obsolete process of sub-atomic fusion that was already in use on Terra Prima. It unites the durability of netranekkon metal, literally as hard as a diamond, with the molecular fluidity of the scales of a great white paleo-shark. This organo-metallic combination is actually a composite whose own immune system protects it from external forces. When a white netranekkon hull receives any kind of impact, it simply absorbs the energy before reverting to its original state, which is preserved in its sub-atomic memory. This ability to shape shift also allows it aerodynamic optimization at the moment of entering the atmosphere. However, the alloy has one disadvantage: its weight. Because of its great mass, just handling it requires colossal force that prohibits its use for armoring smaller ships.

The Interior

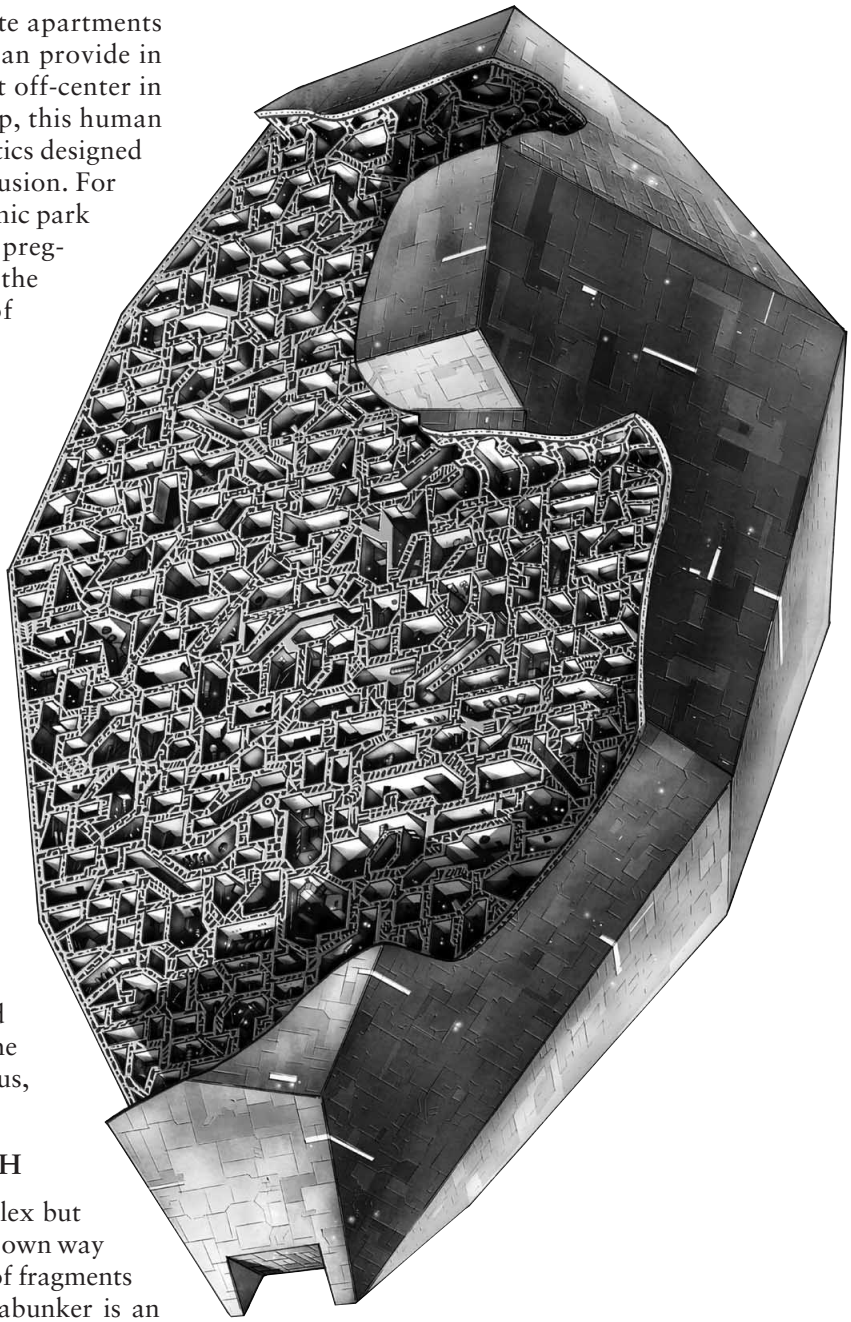
Exclusive domain of Tonto and his much-ridiculed sidekick Lothar, the Metabunker is a kingdom without a king, an empty space without an echo, a home occupied only by a sense of absence. At one time, the Metabaron destroyed his deserted lair; but Tonto — interpreting the Holy Laws of Robotics to his own ends, like a paleo-Jesuit — reconstructed it, in a touching, relentless, but ultimately futile and tedious ritual of hope. Just as before, immense metallic girders stretch in all directions, riddled with shafts and conduits and other mysterious passageways. The master's sumptuous apartments overflow with a thousand treasures, while a few lush gardens bring color, and the sounds of bubbling brooks and singing birds… But it's all for nothing, because the man it's designed for is there no longer. Only Lothar and Tonto roam, overcome with their misery. Lothar is the more desperate, for Tonto seems to harbor some obscure knowledge that keeps his faith alive, occupying whatever circuits serve as his spirit.

Fixtures

Although this immense construction is primarily devoted to the glory of the Metabaron, the portion allocated to his personal use is proportionally very minor. But it is not insignificant, either. Sumptuously fur-

nished and outfitted, his private apartments offer the latest that technology can provide in refinement and comfort. Somewhat off-center in relation to the actual heart of the ship, this human area contains a number of characteristics designed to lighten the Metabaron's bitter disillusion. For example, there is a marvelous hydroponic park where Aghnar used to stroll with the pregnant Oda-Honorata, which indulges the senses with a fairylike symphony of color, sound, smell, and taste, under the loving caress of an artificial sun that adjusts itself to the whims of its visitors.

But the rest of it is entirely Tonto's domain. This little mechanical being is the only one who can find his way through this assortment of rooms of all sizes, some smaller than an alcove and others as large as a paleo-stadium. Only he knows the function of each location, and how to enter it. Most of them are laboratories where he carries out the most bizarre and extreme experiments, a disembodied alchemist free of all human constraints. All the rooms are hermetically separate and totally independent of one another, however connected they may be. Even gravity between them can vary, to the extent that the ceiling of one might be the floor of the other. Lastly, each room has its own distinct voice, and often, for his own pleasure, Tonto makes the Metabunker sing — a tremendous chorus, with hundreds of thousands of voices.



The Supra-logic Labyrinth

The Metabunker can be seen as a complex but coherent union of diverging elements, in its own way representing the converging development of fragments of ideas that lead to reasoning. The Metabunker is an inorganic soul, and the fractal geography of its Supra-Logic Labyrinth mimics the meandering convolutions of thought, periodically interspersed with spontaneous intuition and inspirations of genius. Tonto, the near-godlike conductor of this grand assemblage, intends by his control of it to recreate a kind of primal chaos out of which a new intelligence will rise… Rather than strive to recreate an organism as simple as human, he well and truly intends to reproduce a creative intellect, which is endowed with free will and capable of suffering and feeling emotions.

Game Information

No human — other than the Metabarons, their mates, and their children — has ever been aborad the Metabunker. In fact, nothing other than what the Metabaron allows to be there, is there. For this reason, the typical *Metabarons Roleplaying Game* character will never come across it.

The Metabunker has everything any human could need or desire, can move anywhere at whim, and cannot be destroyed or penetrated without the Metabaron's express permission. In other words, should the Metabunker appear in some adventure, whatever the gamemaster says it can do or has, it can or does.

For more game mechanics on the bio-electrogram, look on pages 27–28 of *Guidebook #1 to Path of the Warrior.* For more information about creating a own home base for players' characters, see page 40 of *Guidebook #1.* For help with general ship creation, peruse pages 72–80 of the *Companion Book to the Game Master Screen.*

Glossary

Acid Lake — The theoretical bottom of an Endocity under which, in reality, extends a gigantic underground universe.

Alien — A creature of the cosmos whose original strain does not originate from Terra Prima. All forms of intelligence, even humanoids, are regarded as aliens.

Amarax — A source of inner vitality for those who strive to harmonize their physical heart with their spiritual heart. In other words, those who lead their lives according to the code of conduct they have chosen for themselves.

Amourine — Mystical and sacred flower that grows in Golden Planet's pure gold or in angelic hearts. It permits a spiritual regeneration for those who consume it.

Aristos — Nobility who live at the top of Endocities. They are generally considered inferior to the Infra-Nobility. *See also Nobility.*

Church of the Industrial Saints — The Empire's official religion and a major pillar of the Empire. The Church's overt submission to Imperial authority amounts to pure charade. Equally called the C.I.S., Techno-Technos Order, Magnus Dei, pan-Techno Church, Techno-Pontificate, the Holy Industrial Church, or H.I.C.

Confederacy of Colonial Planets — An alliance of worlds, peopled with humans from Terra Prima's last emigration wave, who are faithful to the Empire. Loyal to paleo-Marx precepts, they are also called Colonials. They are a major pillar of the Empire.

Confederacy of Parallel Universes — An assembly bringing together representatives from parallel universes neighboring the Human Universe. Its purpose is to arbitrate controversies associated with "common ownership."

Borders — The Human Universe's final frontier zone, in direct contact with neighboring universes. Certain confines are civilized — the Empire ensures a constant surveillance in the majority of these areas — but for the most part, they are barbarian and at the mercy of the hordes with unpredictable tempers who travel across them.

Council, the — The Emperoress's inner circle of advisors, made up of imperial Mentreks, the Imperial Neo-Tarologue Goyo-Vah, and the Neo-Troubadour Vico da Sangle.

Doors of the Universe — Six in number, these doors are passageways through which surge currents coming from neighboring universes.

Ekonomat — A major pillar of the Empire, whose discretion is only equal to its power. The Ekonomat has the upper hand on all financial activities in the Human Universe.

Emperoress — Trans-Bourbon heir, absolute sovereign over all the worlds in the Human Universe and sole representative of the Omni-Nobility. Equally known as the Perfect Androgyne, Supreme Hermaphrodite, and the Sublime Chosen One.

Empire — Federated alliance of worlds in the Human Universe, placed under the Emperoress's supreme authority.

Endocity — Terratransformed city shafts, where billions of individuals live, crammed into the bowels of the planet that houses them.

Endo-fringe — The zone comprising the interior of the fringe's boundaries. The endo-fringe generally refers to the Empire.

Exo-fringe — The zone beyond the fringe. The Empire is working towards establishing its authority in this area.

Fringe — The Human Empire's frontier zone. This zone does not strictly correspond to the Human Universe's geographical boundaries.

Guardians of the Doors — Six in number, these are the superior creatures who guard the Human Universe's six doors. They are sometimes also called Gargales.

Hunchbacks — The Prez's private guard, made up of "remodeled" human elements who are particularly violent.

Hyperspace — A dimension entered by all material bodies once launched at a speed greater than the speed of light, and in which that body can travel without being affected by material elements in its path.

Hypertele — Television medium broadcasting to a universe -wide audience whose programs — which promote sensationalism to the detriment of all other issues — permanently inundate the major and minor worlds of the cosmos.

Imperial Court — The Golden Palace assembly, on Golden Planet, where members of the Nobility are authorized to make an appearance.

Imperial Merchants Guild — The Imperial institution bringing together merchants, working in strict collaboration with the Church of the Industrial Saints, and within the frame work of regulations defined by StellCom. This is also called the Guild of Imperial Merchants.

Interspace — A dimension beyond matter through which the Metabaron travels across the universe, nearing the speed of instantaneous displacement.

Kublar — The Empire's official currency.

Kublarian — A member of a secret society who reveres the Saint Kublar — and in particular the mythic 10 million original edition coins.

Legal Drugs — Alcoholic or psychotropic products that plunge users into a profound stupor or dazed state. Whisky, SPV, and Cocaloco Dark are examples of the most widely used products.

Magnate — Fief or kingdom made up of one or several planets or systems belonging to a Noble family.

Major Forces of the Universe — Six great forces, each one related to the specific nature of a neighboring universe, are at work in the Human Universe. These ethereal forces are also called flux or currents.

Major World — Planet, system, or galaxy representing a pole of strategic, political, or commercial importance, and serviced by a Techno-Tunnel. The Human Universe has 22,000 major worlds.

Mentrek — An individual of human origin having undergone cybernetic brain implantation.

Minor World — All planets, inhabited, or noninhabited that have no Techno-Tunnel service. The Human Universe has a near infinite number of minor worlds, which to a great extent escape the Empire's authority, and are in reality governed by de facto rule.

Mohn — A measure or degree of spiritual awakening among the Neo-Shabda-Oud.

Multi-cogan — A super powerful weapon, elaborated by the C.I.S., manufactured on Kogano II, a tiny planet of the Whak system owned by the Poly-Romanoff family. It is used primarily by the Endoguard troops.

Mutant — Creature having undergone a mutation of his human genes in favor of other living genes, most often animal or vegetable. In the Endocities, the mutants are subjected to general public disgrace by the humans, and are the Hunchbacks' favorite punching bag.

Necro-Dream — A mindless state suffered by those who are exposed to the Techno-Techno's sinister plan of action and its ensuing long term effects. The hypertele and legal drugs are effective means of propagating the Necro-Dream.

Neo-Tarologue — A Neo-Tarot initiate, the only divinatory art still in use today. There are only four Neo-Tarologues in the entire Empire.

Neo-Shabda-Oud Order — Mystical order rebuilt from the ruins of the Shabda-Oud order, which was destroyed by the Metabaron Aghnar.

Nobility — A group made up of members of the Archi-Nobility, the Nobility, and the Infra-Nobility, whose political importance varies according to financial and military criteria. *See also aristos.*

Prez — Supreme Endocity leader, directly under the Emperoress's command. At more or less regular intervals, the Prez clones himself into organisms that are each more staggering and unexpected than the one before.

Saint Technology — All systems, products, and mechanisms developed by the Church of the Industrial Saints. Utilization of anything developed by the C.I.S. is considered as a mark of allegiance to the C.I.S.

Senate — The assembly of the great poles of power in the Human Universe, where representatives of the Four Pillars of the Empire have seats.

Supra-Executive — The Empire's administrative branch and military wing, composed of the Endoguard (placed under the authority of General Thato) and StellCom.

Techno-Sisters — Female followers of the Church of the Industrial Saints. The C.I.S. is a mixed order.

Techno-Tunnels — A device developed by the Techno-Technos to facilitate intersidereal and intergalactic travel. This immense network crosses the Human Universe's web in every direction, linking 22,000 major worlds of the Human Universe to one another.

Thalasynthesis — The name of the procedure used by the Ekonomat to convert water molecules into hydrogen and oxygen atoms and the converse.

Tranka — Highly prized by pirates, this extremely powerful psychotropic product offers, in addition to its hallucinogenic properties, the possibility to erase the Necro-Dream's harmful effects.

Reading List

You can read more about the universe of the Metabarons in the following books.

French Books

Avant l'Incal (Jodorowsky et Janjetov) — 6 albums.

L'Incal (Jodorowsky et Mœbius) — 6 albums.

Après l'Incal (Jodorowsky et Mœbius) — book 1: Le Nouveau Rêve.

La Caste des Méta-Barons (Jodorowsky et Gimenez) — 6 albums.

La Maison des Ancêtres (Jodorowsky et Gimenez) — custom made

Les Technopères (Jodorowsky, Janjetov, et Beltran) — 3 albums.

Above albums published through Les Humanoïdes Associés.

Les Méta-Barons: Livre de Règles (Yéti et West End Games).

English Books

The Incal (Jodorowsky and) — 13 comics and 2 trade paperbacks.

The Metabarons (Jodorowsky and Gimenez) — 17 comics, 1 deluxe comic, and 4 trade paperbacks.

The Technopriests (Jodorowsky, Janjetov, and Beltran) — 3 albums.

Above comics, trade paperbacks, and albums published through Humanoids Publishing.

The Metabarons Rule Book (Yéti and West End Games).

Guidebook #1 to Path of the Warrior (West End Games).

Game Master's Screen with Companion Book (West End Games).

Web Sites

Les Humanoïdes Associés: www.humano.com

Humanoids Publishing: www.humanoids-publishing.com

The Metabarons: www.metabarons.com

Unofficial Metabarons Roleplaying Game Discussion Group (English): groups.yahoo.com/group/metabaronsrpg/

Unofficial Metabarons Roleplaying Game Discussion Group (French): fr.groups.yahoo.com/group/techno-techno/

West End Games: www.westendgames.com